Back to the Pagan World
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John 5:38 And ye have not his word abiding in you: for whom he hath sent, him ye believe not.

To traditional Church members

# Back to the Pagan World

# Chapter 1

On the right-hand side along the old Mearns Road, where the sign on the gate reads *Constable's Cottage*, Abraham was standing by the window at his easel. He loved to paint every day early in the morning. The landscape painting he was working on at the moment was entitled, *Greenbank Gardens towards the sun.* It was coming along nicely.

As soon as he was made redundant, Abraham made his mind up that he was going to be a landscape painter. You see the painting the *Hay Wain,* by *John Constable* had never left him. He had seen it as a young man when he used to live in

London. At that time, he would go to the National Gallery every day to study it. A copy of that famous painting now hung proudly on his wall in his kitchen here on the south side of Glasgow. He often found himself looking at it and smiling to himself, the way you do at an old friend or past relative.

More often than not, Abraham would break off from painting and look out across the road at the two houses opposite him. He knew both his neighbours fairly well by now. One was an ex policeman; his name was Ian. Next to Ian, on his neighbour's lefthand side, was the famous Rick Papadopoulos, otherwise known as the Happy Celebrant. Abraham had only ever been in the Happy Celebrant's house once, but never in the house of the ex policeman. Everyone in the area knew Ricky, as he was called, if not from the local golf club, then from his radio show that was on every other night.

In this suburban area where Abraham lived, the golf club was where most folks went to for a drink, especially at weekends. Non members could get signed in quite easily. Abraham did not play golf much these days, but like his neighbours he liked going along to the bar there for a pint

every Friday night. Most people in the area did this kind of thing. Needless to say, the Happy Celebrant was a celebrity at the local golf club.

Although he liked Scotland, Abraham was always proud to tell people that he was born in East Bergholt, in the District of Suffolk, and that his family had moved here to live in Scotland when he was young, just five years old.

"How things have change," he would often say to them: "Now, I am one of the oldest residents here, since Maisy Campbell last month went into a care home up the Ayr Road."

Although the houses in this area were all pretty much the same, the detached bungalows sold quickly. It was a good spot: to his left lay the town of Clarkston, and in the other direction the Mearns.

The houses on both sides ran parallel to the road down to the toll. However, at the end of his street a line of trees interrupted the houses, and a wooded area ran on for about 500 yards, until a grassy spot appeared. From the past, the lovely name 'Tinkers' had been given to it. This was a play area with swings for children, and where trees and bushes broke up the monotony of the post war housing area. Further on you could go

right towards the shops at Clarkston, and on to the train station there, if you wanted to, or left at the roundabout and head towards the city of Glasgow.

It goes without saying that when the Happy Celebrant arrived in this area, just over a decade, he got to know everyone pretty quickly. He was after all in show business, and although not pushy was always keen to make himself known to others.

As Abraham put down his brush this morning, he remembered that not long after the Happy Celebrant had moved into his this area, he was invited over for the house warming party. That night in the Happy Celebrant's house he met all kinds of people, from all walks of life. Abraham vowed it would be the last time he went to any kind of party involving his neighbour. The people there were so shallow. He noticed they talked about nothing more than themselves: where they had been, what they were buying, and who they had seen.

"Make sure you have an excuse ready the next time the Happy Celebrant comes calling," he told himself.

Strangely enough he was never invited again. In any case, Abraham was not one for going into other people's houses; he was always out walking in the countryside. People could see he was in love with nature.

The painter as soon as he got back into his house always went straight to his easel and back to work again. It was usually a landscape painting he had on the go. Even though his main output was pastoral scenes, he did from time to time dabble in modern art. He usually had three or more paintings on the go at the one time, each painting of course at a different stage.

This morning he downed tools just before midday and headed out for his constitutional morning walk. Abraham always went the same way. The route he went was up the Mearns Road, through the golf course, past the expensive houses there, then it was either over towards Eaglesham, or up towards the Mearns he would go.

# 2

The news bulletins coming from all over the world were desperate stuff, some even apocalyptic. There was no doubt about it all countries were shutting due to the virus threat. It had apparently started in China in a market there, and had now spread right throughout the entire world. Abraham was mindful of this, but was not overly concerned. However, when one bulletin came on reporting that all pubs, clubs and schools were to shut, and that only essential

businesses were to stay open, he knew that it was serious then.

Before going out this morning, he drank his tea at the breakfast table, and tried to cheer himself up: “When they shut the pubs it is either a war, or a plague going on,” he joked as he knocked off the top of his egg.

Although laughing he knew the main point they were putting over was to avoid contact with others. Abraham had cancelled a trip to Palermo, and another one to Germany the following month. He even cancelled a trip down south to East Bergholt, to the area he was born. Even in his own country, he felt that it would not be much fun; everyone would be suspicious of him wandering around looking at the landscape, sketching fields and buildings. The other thing that put him off was he had to go through London to get there, and London he had read was like all large cities badly affected.

In truth be told, due to the curfew, Abraham knew that he would really miss going to Glasgow, every day. Like most folks in the city, he enjoyed visiting high street stores, going to bars and shops and meeting likeminded people who were interested in his art.

He would now have to deal with everything online: paying bills and taxes by credit and debit card. Trying to get his money back from prearranged trips he knew would be difficult. Like everyone else he would just have to sit it out and wait until things got back to normal.

Abraham was thankful for the house and the area where he stayed in, and after thinking about not being able to travel abroad again this year, he once more settled back into his rustic lifestyle. His bungalow was in good shape; for it had just been renovated inside and out.

At the beginning of the year, during the upgrade, he had gone away to Cyprus. This was to let the workers get on with it. In fact, the painters had just finished at midday the day before he got back. He arrived on the Sunday, the first of March at Edinburgh Airport, and when he got home to Glasgow, he picked up the keys from his neighbour and friend, old Mrs Tavistock, who lived just along the road from him.

After getting things organised in the house, the weekend just seemed to fly by, "And here we are again," he yawned as he opened the door: "It's Monday," and with a smile he went outside.

Abraham liked where he stayed. More than anything, he loved the fact that within a few minutes, he was away from the hustle and bustle, off the main road and was in the heart of the country. The paths Abraham walked ever day he knew so well. They took him far and wide into other local country villages, idyllic spots, fields and meadows. Every morning, once off the main road, Abraham would head up past the farm. Sometimes, if the weather was good, he would go way out further into the moors.

Like many men over fifty in life, Abraham had been paid off. The modern tech world had no place for middle-aged men. In his case he was delighted; he happily retreated from the dog eat dog world of commerce and industry into a world of aesthetic pursuits.

Abraham was in no way upset at the way things had turned out. With his parents both gone, he may be on his own now, but he loved the freedom he had and was never stuck without something to do. He was not a loner; people could see that in him. As soon as he was outside, along the country road, Abraham always stopped and spoke to other friendly villagers when he came across them.

Not many people around here knew that Abraham was not born in this part of the world. He had a polite Scottish accent. Little did they know his family came from East Bergholt - Constable country. He often went back there from time to time in search of happy childhood memories, lost but not forgotten.

When he was young, he always remembered his mother had told him that if he worked hard, he would become a great painter in life, just like John Constable. This had been in his mind for a while now, and the main reason he had started painting again. This time he was serious about it, so much so that when he finished a painting he offered it for sale right away.

Abraham always remembered those happy days when he was young, how they spent their time together in the English countryside. His father had been a house builder and had worked for a contractor in Manchester. After a few years they had sent him to this area, here on the south side of Glasgow, where he now lived. He still remembered his dad travelling back down to see them at weekends, and his mother saying to him: "What is it like up there, Ted?"

Later in life, Abraham found out he had worked on many houses around this area. His father liked Scotland, so much so that he brought the family up north, after he had retired and bought a house from the company who commissioned him to build them. Abraham liked the family home and that was the reason he had never moved from it after his parents had passed away. The two bed roomed bungalow was situated just along the old Mearns Road, not far from the main suburban area called Clarkston.

As usual this morning, Abraham took his trekking stick in his hand and off he went along the road, happy as any man could be. It was early spring and the weather was lovely. Soon he knew he would be off the main road and up past Flenders Farm. Even though he lived on a busy road, he always forgot about it as soon as there were fields around him. Desperate thoughts inside him, mainly fears about society, simply disappeared. He noticed his worries all seemed to evaporate as soon as he walked along through the country. It was as if modern anxieties could not get to him *extra muros*, and annoy him.

When he was indoors watching tv, or sitting by the fireside, he became subdued, but the

‘Blues’ as they were called he knew had nothing to do with the nightmare modern world during a pandemic. Every night and day now celebrities appeared on tv: politicians and pundits guiding the nation on how to live. They were now even popping up on his computer screen telling him what to do. The only way to get away from them was to go outside into the country. He knew that much.

At this momentous time, it was just as well he had the country to go to. Abraham knew he was not only living through a pandemic, but living in a modern pagan time where the majority believed in nothing but themselves. “How would I have survived lockdown, without God’s given countryside to go to,” he murmured to himself, as he walked along the road.

The pandemic certainly was all over Europe; no one could deny that. Governments were not shutting down the economy for the fun of it. In fact, by this time they had ordered their citizens to stay at home until it was safe to travel, or rather until they could cope with the demand from those hospitalised by the virus: a deadly strain of flu called Covid-19.

“Nice day,” a middle aged mum said to him going back down towards the main road.

“Yes, it is lovely isn’t it,” answered Abraham. “It has been good weather recently.”

“Just as well,” said the woman as she stopped, “now being in lockdown.”

By the sound of her voice it was plain to see, like others, she was weary of the restriction placed on her by both national and local government.

“It's terrible.” Abraham sympathised, as he too stopped walking.

“The one thing I think the pandemic will do is remake communities, though” suggested the woman to him: “Don’t you think, everyone has become so polite and friendly.”

It was a fair point she made: “Yes, that is true,” responded Abraham: “The reason for that is that no one can escape where they live anymore.”

The woman laughed, but she knew it was true: never had so many people stopped and said hello to others when out walking during this time of lockdown.

Abraham, as he looked across at the lovely country fields he knew so well wondered aloud at

what was happening, and how it would all end: “Not only are people dying, but the economy is in meltdown,” he lamented, and as if to steady himself he stabbed his stick into the earth, “Bars and restaurant and concerts look at least a year away. Life savings spent on holidays all gone up in smoke.”

The woman nodded: “It's dreadful, I know, isn’t it.”

Seeing her clearly worried, Abraham thought he had better offer his upbeat lockdown catchphrase to her: “Well, we are all in the same boat - keep paddling.”

The woman may have laughed at this, but she knew like everyone else they were living in unprecedented times. It really was difficult for everyone. No one understood what was really going on, and moreover how and when it would all clear up. Some commentators said that it was an unseen threat that could never be eliminated; others said it would be over before Christmas.

Governments all over the world were trying there best to follow the advice from scientists to protect the health service from being overwhelmed. The plan with exception of a handful of countries was basically the same: to

shut everything down and wait and hope this would stop the spread of it. But no one really knew how long it would go on for. The ending of travel, the enforcement of only being allowed out for an hour every day had changed people in many different ways. Now that the first stage of lockdown was coming to an end, everyone was wondering what was coming next?

# 3

As it has been documented, the man who lived opposite Abraham, along the old Mearns Road, was an ex policeman. He said very little to neighbours, even during a pandemic. It was well known you only ever got a few words out of him at the club on a Friday night, after he had one or two G and T's. Ian had not long retired from the police force, and had lived for a time in a district nearby, before moving into this area after a material change in his life.

To Abraham, he looked as if he had seen things in life he did not want to talk about. Word soon got around the area that he was not long divorced. Apparently, the woman's name was Anne, a local girl he had met at work. Ian had settled here into this area, in his new house, for just over a year now. Even though he never showed any emotion, he was part of the local community. This was the way it was with him in this friendly neighbourhood.

The property guide, Abraham remembered advertised his house as 'just off the old avenue,' a traditional bungalow in a good location,' this must have appealed to him; for he bought it right away.

Every Friday night, everyone in the local area went to the bar at the golf club. Even non members who lived down at Clarkston came up at weekends to the club for a drink, or something to eat at the clubhouse. There were other social venues around the area, but the general opinion was that they were all dull, modern, pristine and boring.

According to Deirdre, who poured the pints at the local golf club, it had never been a close relationship with his wife Anne. Apparently, the

only thing that kept them together was Angela their daughter. Ian would have kept the relationship going, but his wife got so fed up with his dull existence that one night she walked out on him, saying: "It is like living with a silent partner."

Ian was certainly not the life and soul of the party - everyone could see that. As is the way in all villages, the local gossip travelled with ease from the bar at the golf club into the ears of people near and far who wanted to know about things like that. It was well known that if you wanted to find out what was going on within the local area - the clubhouse at the local golf course was the place to go to. Even when it was quiet you could always chat with Pinty there at the bar. He was a member aged about forty who never went out onto the course, but was always standing there drinking a pint of beer up against the bar.

It soon became apparent to Abraham that Ian must have known the area before he moved into the house opposite him, due to his work in the police force. He had heard at the club, Ian used to visit his old sergeant David Meek who live just round the corner from the course. It was natural that Ian would have dropped in to see him, as and when he was required to do so. Mr Meek he knew

passed away just before lockdown. In fact, they had raised a glass after the funeral for him inside the golf club that evening.

Thinking back to that night this is where Abraham first set eyes on Ian and noticed how troubled he looked. Every Friday night he was a regular there now - like everyone else in the area, but he never said anything about his life.

It also came to light that the only thing wrong with Ian's new flat was his next door neighbour, Rick Papadopoulos, otherwise known to everyone in the local area as the Happy Celebrant. Ricky as he was sometimes called was a well known DJ. It was plain to see that this man was no ordinary man. He let everyone know that in his spare time he conducted funeral services, no doubt to keep the pennies coming in. Everyone knew him; for as soon as he moved into this area ten years ago, he promoted himself as a local celebrity. He was well known further afield too due to him being on the radio, and when people came to visit the club they recognised his voice right away.

"Ah, you're that guy that does the radio talk show at night..."

To everyone in the local area from the outset it was obvious Ian could not stand him. The story

from the bar was that when he first surveyed his house on the south side, Ian chapped the door of the DJ, and out came the Happy Celebrant, and in his trained American radio voice greeted the potential buyer, saying: "Great to see you, my man. Ah, the old house next door. Yea, it is up for sale again. Good man. I tell you, you will be a great addition to the local area if you get it..."

From time to time, Abraham would meet the Happy Celebrant while out walking, and they would chat to each other outside his house. They talked mainly about the usual things: what was going on in the world, and what was happening over at the club.

By this time, Abraham knew him quite well; for he had been here a while now, and as the Americans say he was 'super friendly'. It must be said that it was always outside his house where they met, or when Abraham was in his garden. The Happy Celebrant never walked anywhere; he was too much of a townie for that.

Abraham liked him, but he could see he was drawn to famous people. This was due to the nature of his job, he guessed. He could also see the Happy Celebrant lived inside a world where he was always on the radio, introducing some

song or chatting to some punter over the airwaves.

At first, when he moved into this area Abraham, like others, wondered if he really was American, but he soon found out he was born in Corfu in the town of Sidari. Abraham just accepted him for what he was. It was in his nature to do so: "Live and let live, after all," was how he had been brought up.

To his credit Ricky, that's what Abraham called him, soon got used to the White honky image he was portrayed as by the locals. Abraham when out walking would sometimes hear him playing his guitar when he passed by his house; for he always left his window open. If he was spotted, the Happy Celebrant would come over to the window at the front of his house and shout to his neighbour going by: "Abraham, you heading for the hills again? Good man, I tell you it's good to keep the old legs going, my friend."

That morning from across the road, sitting in his garden, Abraham watched Ian's car arrive. He always came back just before midday. You could almost set your watch by it.

Today was lovely. It was early June and when it was like this Abraham, if he was not walking in

the country, loved to sit out in his garden in the sunshine and read his Guardian newspaper on his iPad. It may have been a busy main road they lived on, but there was hardly any traffic now, going up or down it, due to the pandemic.

Like others in the area on one side of his house, Ian had an extension and a garage for his car. It was the same over the hedge for his neighbour, on his left hand side, Rick Papadopoulos, the Happy Celebrant.

It was good fortune, in Abraham's garden, there was a gap just between the large fir tree and his hedge, and this gave him access to view the houses across the road without being seen. Due to the fact he had no car, he used his garage as a gallery for his paintings.

That morning, as Abraham sat outside in the sunshine, he looked over his iPad and spotted the Happy Celebrant. He could see his neighbour across the road; he was up a ladder cutting the tall hedge next to the wooded area. His was the last house before a forest of trees partitioned the larger built houses further up from the bungalows down the road. On the opposite side of this lay the golf course and, after that the main road continued, from there you could go left and head

towards the farm and into the country if you wanted to, or straight up to the next suburban town Newton Mearns. Whatever way you went this is where the local area seemed to end and another part of it began.

Abraham, as he watched both his neighbours across the road, guessed right: for Ian when he appeared in his car made an effort to avoid acknowledging his neighbour, the Happy Celebrant, by staying in his vehicle a few moments longer - no doubt hoping to slip into his house unnoticed. He was not in luck though; for as soon as Ian got out of his car, the Happy Celebrant came down the ladder, looked back over the faraway hedge that separated them, and shouted out: "Great to see you big man! You heading for the golf course today?"

Captured by his mid Atlantic tones, Ian stopped at the corner of his house and replied dolefully: "Why are you not in the studio today Ricky, entertaining the masses?"

"Great question, big man," croaked the DJ. "The reason for that is that I have got to officiate at a farewell service today at three pm, up at the old crematorium. Another good man, I am afraid transferring onto the night shift."

Ian was too old to react to this nonsense. Now 65, it was plain to see he accepted the fact that he was heading for a dull twilight existence. He had been retired now for about three years and, unlike others of his age, Ian had not found a new lease of life after leaving the police force.

In complete contrast to this his sprightly neighbour across the way, Rick Papadopoulos was a happy 63 year old Celebrant, going about like a young thing. He dressed like a teenager, and sang to anyone on his guitar whenever he got the chance to do so. Everyone could see he was still rocking and rolling through life, working on the radio at night, and conducting funeral services during the day.

In fact, one of the special features he offered was that he would on request bring along his Gibson guitar and sing to the guests a farewell song, if they so wished or desired. Apparently, *When I am dead and gone*, was his most requested song, by the pop band: *McGuinness Flint*.

Presently, the Happy Celebrant pushed his ladder to one side and started tending to his little rock garden in front of his house. He too also liked to sit outside in the summer and have a coffee or soft drink there. Many bungalow owners

did this kind of thing, but very few shouted across at the neighbours the way the Happy Celebrant did.

When he spotted Abraham sitting outside, he would always shout to him to come over and see him. Abraham usually waved back then made up an excuse; for he knew he liked to take him into his garage, and show off his weights and other equipment for body building. Even folks - who did not know him - could see by the way he acted, the Happy Celebrant was an extrovert.

In his developed radio mid Atlantic voice to try and get Ian interested before he went back inside his house, he quipped: "Nice wheels, big man! Is that a new car you have been getting yourself?"

Ian before climbing the seven little steps up to his house stared at him, as if to wonder how someone like that could get into a prominent role in society and still be a loose cannon. "Yea, that's right" he said to himself, "Same one as I had last year," and walked slowly up the steps towards his door.

Ian was not in good shape. You could tell that by the way he walked. His gate was slow and ponderous. He looked well enough, but that was

due to the fact he was not over weight, and was always in a suit and had his haircut short. He had once been a keen golfer. When he became a member of the local club across the road from where he lived, he was out most days - but not now.

The course along with the club chairman may have been a major factor of him buying the house here in this area. However, he only went out on the course these days when the club chairman did. You see Ian's only one friend in life was the club chairman Derrick Miller, or better known to everyone in the local as little Napoleon. Apparently, they had met a few years ago at the local church. This may have been the reason he bought the house across the road from the course.

Ian still had all the attributes of a copper, even though he had been a pen pusher for most of his working life in the constabulary. Like many others before him, computers had ended his career. This happened just as he was entering his final stage of his working life.

Just then, there was a loud buzzing noise as Ricky picked up his electric hedge cutter. Presently, he started clipping the hedge again on the other side to Ian. This noise seemed to go

right through the whole area like warning from the manufacturer as to the new sonic cutting edge technology on the go these days, used in this instance by their client Rick Papadopoulos, otherwise known as the Happy Celebrant.

# 4

It was a lovely early spring day, and most of the local residents were outdoors, maintaining the lawn, trimming the hedge or weeding the path. Yes, it was time to enjoy outdoor activities at home, now that most businesses were shut down due to the pandemic. However, it must be said though no one was as loud as the Happy Celebrant talking while working with modern appliances.

"Oh it is a day for the garden, Ian old boy!" he shouted over to his neighbour, as he whizzed along the top of the hedge.

Unlike Abraham across the road, the Happy Celebrant had no green lawn; for the previous occupant had redesigned the space in front of the house and built a rock garden there, and put red chips down to compensate for the lack of green space around it.

The Happy Celebrant must have appreciated him doing this, for he had not changed it in any way, shape or form. However, even though he was not green fingered he always commented about how lovely Ian's garden was, and how other neighbour's were putting him to shame with their tidy gardens, knowledge of plants and shrubs.

When he finished trimming the hedge, the Happy Celebrant gazed down from upon his ladder and once more buttered his neighbour up with more transatlantic words: "I tell you Ian, your lawn is like a bowling green from over here. Good job man!"

Abraham looked across the road when he heard him say this, but he could not see the grass from where he sat. He knew Ian always kept it in good order. Abraham did notice Ian, however, look over at the Happy Celebrant and stare at him. It was a strange stare, almost empty. It was plain to see he had no empathy for his neighbour

at all. According to Deirdre the barmaid, at the golf club, Ian hated everything about him.

Apparently, he let this slip one night after a few G and T's. He thought the Happy Celebrant an arrogant little shit. Of course, he could not be open about that. To hide what he was thinking, Ian confirmed what everyone was saying at the moment. In his usual monotone voice, he replied: "Yea, the weather is lovely, today."

It was well known that every other night the Happy Celebrant was on the radio, playing jingles and songs, and speaking to people from all over the country. He also did a lot of adverts on the radio and tv. So you could not really escape his Mid-Atlantic tones, even if you wanted to. 'Way down there on the old Mearns Road today, I bet they are sunning themselves outside on their private lawns. Yes, they are fine folks who live there. Here is a track from *Men at Work*, just to help my friends there who are cutting the hedge or cleaning the old gutters. It's hard work in the garden, you know, if you don't have a song to sing along to...'

Abraham imagined the Happy Celebrant saying this, as he sat there in his front garden looking across the road at his neighbours, and he

smiled to himself. Strangely enough he could hear that very song drift out from a radio somewhere down the road, and this added to the drama he was thinking about. For a time, Abraham hummed along with the tune, for it was one he liked. It was not the sort of track though the Happy Celebrant normally played; he knew he was more into American funk and black female soul singers.

Like everyone else, Abraham could not get away from his neighbour, even when he was not at home. This did not really bother him though; for he could see the funny side of it all.

As he sat there in his small front garden, Abraham remembered what Ian had said to little Napoleon at the bar last Friday. Not only that the way he had said it in a depressed slimy tone: "You know, on Monday, I was driving into town over to see my daughter Angela, on the other side of Glasgow. It was a nice morning. Then all of a sudden on comes that numpty Rick Papadopoulos on the radio: 'It's is another nice day today. You folks no doubt driving into town will be getting a bit hot under the collar. DJ Rick here will keep you cool with the latest grooves from across the Atlantic..."

Ian could not really mimic his funny voice, but it was obvious to everyone who heard him at the bar that night who he was talking about. The thing that really upset him though Abraham thought was not so much that Rick Papadopoulos was a local celebrity on the radio. No, it was because he had taken up the role as a Celebrant.

Ian mentioned this to Deirdre in the company of Abraham at the bar a few weeks before: "Imagine getting him to speak for you at your farewell service."

The people at the bar may have laughed at this, but Abraham noticed once again that Ian did not find it funny when he said it. In the local area most folks liked Ricky. They just thought him an entertainer, and more often than not they would laugh at him as they quoted his banner headline from his website: '*Contact the Happy Celebrant for a good send off.'*

The background to this is interesting. Word got round from other members that Ian had got to know his only friend little Napoleon many years ago. Both had been regular attenders at the local church. The congregation, however, split over the appointment of a same sex minister and those that had stayed left not long after. Believers

there knew that they had been given a great tradition that went all the way back to the upper room.

It happened like this: when New Age people arrived and imposed their new doctrines on the members, in a short period of time, the spirit had gone, along with it the majority of worshipers. It was said men and women who followed the guru there had an understanding of church life, though not the workings of the Holy Spirit and the scriptures. The guru wanted them to branch out into the modern world and embrace all its wonders. The congregation duly went along with things for a time, but it was apparent to those who had an understanding of theology that something had gone wrong: for it had been one of the main churches on the south side since the creation of churches in this area.

After it shut, Ian and little Napoleon both tried other churches, but somehow they could not fit in. The Baptists apparently were too secretive, the Anglicans too English and the Jehovah Witnesses, along with the Pentecostal movements, too way out.

On the other hand, Rick Papadopoulos had never been part of any church, but with the

demise of organised religion, he saw an opportunity for additional employment there. He had always refused to join a church, only going along for weddings, funerals or baptisms. He told Deirdre at the bar that the reason he got into this line of work was that he could not help but admire the theatre of it all. Like all men who want to be something in life, he was an opportunist, and when an opening appeared in the funeral business, as they say in the modern world, he went for it.

When asked about this at the club by the barmaid, he confirmed to Deirdre: "Yes, I spotted the chance with the demise of organised religion to officiate at funerals, got myself a website and set myself up as a Happy Celebrant, and the rest they say is history. After all, someone had to do it."

It was clear to those who knew Rick Papadopoulos that he was not a professional mourner. They could see he was just someone who empathised with public speakers and liked to be in the limelight. After all, he never hid from anyone that he was in show business.

Abraham had heard that the week after the local church shutdown, true to his word Rick

Papadopoulos set up his website. As then as now the heading read on his website: *Contact me for a good send off. The Happy Celebrant your MC for funerals and burials.*

The locals thought it good fun, that is until it came to their turn to call on him and to ask him if he would speak at the funeral of a loved one. Having said that he was good with the public: he gave them what they wanted. On his biography page on the drop down menu it gave his background and what charities he was involved with. Now sixty he was keen to show off what he had done and all the tricks of the trade he had learnt along the way. He never cast up the spirit of the person though, gone from family or friends: for that was not in his gift, but he portrayed them as they had been seen by others, and this seemed to satisfy his clients.

Even in sadness, Rick Papadopoulos could charm the mourners with one liners about the deceased. The Happy Celebrant could even make his audience feel good before they left the building, with light humour, and well-timed jokes. This was obviously the most important thing he thought he should do. After all, he was dealing with non believers like himself. Life was all about

show business and there was nothing more than that to it.

Rick Papadopoulos knew few people in the modern world believed in the other side of life. Most folks were like him; they believed in nothing other than what was around them in the mundane world. Beyond the television image the majority of the public did not go, and he knew that. “I'm your man for a good send off,” he often said to others when they called him up on the phone.

Someone at the club told the barmaid Deirdre that his American accent started not long after he left the island of Corfu. Of course, when he arrived in the states he individualised it and perfected it there. Abraham wondered about this and also where did his natural voice go to that he left behind him. Did he leave it on the boat or on the plane, and would it come back to him one day?

It was plain to see that being an entertainer was the only thing for Rick Papadopoulos. He admitted that to others: “Death is show business, even if the audience do not know it,” he often said this to a group of members at the bar.

Just at that moment, old Mrs Tavistock came hurrying into his garden: “Abraham there are men up the back at the lane cutting down trees.”

Abraham stood up and looked at her as she stood in the path. He thought she cut quite a figure standing there in her pinny dress, and he smiled at her, then he went round the back with her to see what was going on.

It was true what she said. He could see at the far end before the fence meandered along the right of way through the golf course, three men dressed in hard hats, and protective florescent clothing. One man was abseiling down a tree with the clear intent of attacking it.

“What are you doing?” asked Abraham when he got close to them.

The fellow above him with a sandy coloured beard looked straight out of university. Abraham knew there was no use petitioning him on the world of beauty and nature around him.

He was right for the young fellow spoke the usual nonsense back to him: “These trees are in the way of the digital poll, mate...”

Abraham thought to himself: “They must have set themselves up to make some money by

chopping down trees for companies who like that sort of thing."

In a voice as if he had the right to rearrange the world, the young fellow with the sandy beard as he lowered himself down to the ground repeated to Abraham: "We are here to maintain the telegraph poll for the Telecom company."

"I don't mind you pruning the trees, but not cutting them down," countered Abraham sternly.

Abraham had seen this industry at work all over the country, mainly outside wealthy houses, country villages, playing fields and nurseries. After destroying the trees, he knew they stuck the branches into an industrial machine and then sold the wood cuts to garden stores, and gardeners all around the country. In fact, they would cut down trees for anyone who paid them to do so. He could see a man further up the lane waiting with such a machine.

They were too far gone now, so Abraham took a few pictures on his phone, then he went back to the house and wrote an email to the local Councillor.

*Dear Elected Member,*

*As I write, we have the Telecom contractors out the back today. The property owner would not have known about this unless the neighbour chapped his door. She saw them from the window.*
*They have turned up without consultation, entered the property, by opening the fence at the lane, and have come in and caused vandalism.*
*The chief worker with the Sandy hair and beard tells me he thought the ground their poll was situated on was on wasteland. Was this a likely story, we shall see?*
*I always try and protect the environment from vandals. Had they chapped my door, I would not have stopped them pruning trees to access their poll, but they would have been told not to cut them down; for the sake of the environment. I have learnt that there is no use mentioning the beauty of wildlife to tree-cutters.*
*When I spoke with them they had not started to cut down the trees. However, as you will see, they could not care if I was the owner or not: for that is what they have done. Please see pictures attached.*
*The last time I went to see the sad sight they were just about to fell the tree on the council side.*
*One wonders if this is the way they are working now: corporate interest pushing aside the law; no interest in local government and the rules people must abide by.*

*It is easy for me to say contractors need to be given their instructions correctly: how to inform tenants and owners about what they wish to do: for we cannot have them a law unto themselves entering into private property cutting down trees and vandalising the area. However, to do that we need representatives to ensure that corporations cannot destroy communities and the beauty of our God given countryside. That all leads back to you the elected member copied in.*

# 5

The next day in the garden Abraham thought long and hard about the time he was living in. It was all so strange. The facts were stark: by the end of the 20th century Christianity had started to wane all over Europe. Scotland was now - like other countries - back to the pagan world. The Church of Scotland was just a voice for the state. Everywhere in Scotland men and women were being swept aside, if they did not fit in with the new dark tech state. No one complained. The

traditional Scottish culture was all but forgotten about. The media now promoted a liberal elite culture.

Abraham knew all of this and avoided the political messengers like the plague. Whenever they turned up on the tv or internet he switched them off. He knew he was living in a time when there was no collective responsibility; communities had been subdued. They were the plaything for corporate academics and rich financiers. Even though society seemed to have flipped, he was glad of where he stayed; for at least here he told himself he could avoid the world by going outside into the lovely countryside. This was the answer to him to the nightmare world going on around him.

There was sadness, of course in his heart; for the traditions of his father had been swept away. He remembered the old church fondly. It would not be life if everything stayed the same, but all the same he was sad to see the old Scottish Kirk traditions disappear. There was certainly no joy now that he had arrived back to the pagan world.

On his walks, he did meet some like minded free spirits, but he could see they could not be relied upon when talking to them about how to

avoid state control. In their living rooms his neighbours he could see were being hypnotised by new technology. Every day they stared at the colourful picture frame bracketed on their wall, and listened to tv pundits, celebrities and politicians. They were always arguing with each other in the media. The target was always the same: money. All conversations seemed to return to that. No one cared less than multinationals about society. Educated people knew climate change, robots, mass surveillance would be upon the world soon. This subdued them and for some reason made them passive.

When he met friends, in society, if they had not been compromised by the curse of the corporate state, they were apathetic about what was going on in society. It seemed all too easy these days to drop out and become a loser, or an outcast. This ran through families and communities. It was now the norm; but if truth be told few knew the new pagan world had returned. On the other hand, many could not care less.

It was no wonder Abraham walked out into the countryside to get away from it all. Mercifully, there were still parts untouched by the

uneducated hand of corporations and wayward councillors. In the country, he could breathe again and escape from the people - just like the ones who had commissioned the tree-cutters - who wanted to control society.

After breakfast this morning, Abraham opened his front door and walked outside, and he sat down at the far end of his small tidy lawn. It had been warm during the night, that is why he left his deckchair out. The sunshine made everything pleasant all around him.

As he looked over the low wall, Abraham sighed to himself: "Ah, what a lovely day," and once more he opened up his iPad.

It was not long after this the Happy Celebrant came outside and he too looked across his hedge, and seeing Ian his neighbour working near his car shouted over to him: "Ian, you remember old Davy Mellows?"

Ian pottering about outside the garage was just about to fix something inside his car. He reacted in his usual dull way: "Yea, what about him?" he said refusing to turn round.

"Got a call last night, our friend is moving on to the night shift," reported the Happy Celebrant.

“Didn't he end up in the shipyards,” Ian asked, as he shut the boot of his car.

“That's him, good old Davy boy. He loved a pint and a pie, and went to the football every Saturday, along with his cousin Patrick.”

Abraham watched his neighbours closely. He knew from what he said that the Happy Celebrant had another commission: for that was what he always said when someone had passed away. He also noticed once again the strange way the two neighbours communicated with each other. It was unnatural, as if there was something hidden between them that kept them apart.

Abraham reckoned that what he had just said would be part of the Happy Celebrant’s speech on the day of the service, for the man called Davy Mellows. Abraham could also see that Ian was glad he was not going to be there to hear the rest of it.

When Abraham first met Rick Papadopoulos, he remembered that he boasted that the reason he got into funerals was after reading a book by the Dalai Lama. He even quoted to him from it: *The purpose of our lives is to be happy.*

Just at that moment back came the nasal voice of the American show business man from across

the road: “I am told Davy's son will carry on the tradition of supporting the old team every Saturday. His dad though will be sadly missed no doubt by all the supporters and his friends.”

Abraham could see that the ex policeman in his heart, thought his neighbour an arrogant showman. In fact, he had said as much to little Napoleon at the bar at the golf club: “I was hoping that character Rick Papadopoulos, otherwise known as the Happy Celebrant, would have sold his house by this time and left the area. Unfortunately, there is no sign of that,” he moaned to his friend the club chairman.

It was plain to see the ex copper was sick of the sight of his neighbour. That night, little Napoleon in his usual way made a joke of it that went down well that night with the crowd at the golf bar - it even made Ian laugh. “Ian you will have to do him in, I am afraid?”

Abraham had never seen his neighbour Ian like that before. He also remembered that Ian had nodded at the club chairman after he had said this, then he stared away out into his own thoughts again as if to commune with another there.

When he returned to the world around him, Ian must have felt the eyes of his friends on him and to be diplomatic, he added: "Yes, I will need to get some of my old pals in the force onto him. I am sure someone in the tech department can plant a bugging device in his house, and we can see what he is up to."

It was true to say that Ian still looked like a cop, and of course he spoke like one too. He dressed in bland clothes and was suspicious of everyone. The other strange thing was he looked around him at the world as if a crime was just about to take place.

Abraham reckoned that something must have happened to him after his divorce. It was a strange thing for Abraham to think about; it was as if Ian realised that time was running out for him. This for some reason must have sharpened his focus on his neighbour.

Everyone who went to the bar on a Friday night at the club could see how bitter he was towards the Happy Celebrant. On the other hand, the Happy Celebrant was a colourful character, nothing seemed to worry him. He ignored any grievances against him, as if he was the greatest man who had ever lived. His

personality for sure was at times overpowering, as if he could walk through walls, but he was not devious or malicious in anyway.

Outside his house, Ian walked from the side door where a small extension had been built, and stopped there to look for something, then he came back round to the front of his house again. Once there he got his house keys out of his pocket, and headed back up the seven steps to his front door.

"I will be brown before the day goes down," came the chirpy tones of the Happy Celebrant, trying to engage him. Hearing no reply, as he looked over the hedge again, he appended, "Got any plans for a holiday this year, big man?"

"Oh, will have to wait and see how things go after lockdown," came the dull reply before Ian closed his front door.

# 6

Across the road, as he sat in his old fashioned deckchair reading his Manchester Guardian, Abraham thought it very entertaining indeed. However, he knew there was a serious undercurrent to it all. It was plain to see, Ian could not understand why he had been placed next to this false face entertainer. It was now apparent to him that the Happy Celebrant was his nemesis. Everyone could see that. It was not just bad luck, it was definitely some kind of punishment from an old enemy or evil spirit.

Without a sense of humour, Abraham could tell that Ian's face reflected his feelings towards his neighbour though not his words. Some unknown conflict was feeding all kinds of horrors within his soul. He looked depressed and morbid at the best of times. The ex policeman lurched around the place as if all life was now defunct. It was only when bad news surfaced in a conversation, be it on the street or at the bar in the club, that he would engage with others as if that was the bond between them. When he heard him talking to others about things that were happening in life, Abraham thought Ian was not so much angry about life - he was psychotic.

As Abraham looked over his iPad across the road again at the two houses opposite him, he could see the Happy Celebrant was now tidying up the little rock garden in front of his house. Some litter had blown in from the street. As he looked to his left, Abraham noticed Ian starring out at Rick Papadopoulos behind his right hand curtain. Not only that moments later he watched Ian taking pictures of his neighbour, the Happy Celebrant, in his garden, as he worked away.

"What is he up to?" wondered Abraham.

He knew this attention was not due to the fact that he was a fan of the well known entertainer from the south side.

Where Abraham lived all the houses looked onto the main road that led up to what was called the Broom, which then went onto the main centre called the Mearns. The only odd feature to the observant eye in this area was that on the other side of the road there were two bus stops close by each other. It was obviously a mistake to place them there so near. Abraham often wondered why they had put them there so close together on the same side of the road, it didn't make any sense.

As soon as he went inside his house, the Happy Celebrant picked up his acoustic guitar and started to play it. Presently, a well known Paul Mccarrtney song flowed out onto the street. The neighbours knew that above all other artists, he liked him more than anyone else. The Happy Celebrant loved playing his instrument morning noon and night; he always left the door open so that passers by could hear him singing. It was well known he sang at funerals and weddings if requested to do so.

The sound of his guitar and his voice, as it drifted outside that morning, made an eerie sound; for his croaky tones for some reason dominated the chords more than usual. Ian could hear it from next door and so could Abraham from across the road. This did not annoy Abraham, but he knew his neighbour across the road was not singing along to the popular tune the man next door was playing.

Ian before he disappeared behind the curtain again took out from inside his trouser pocket a bottle of pills and took one. Abraham assumed this was from the doctor for his nervous disposition. "The doctor must have prescribed this for his anxiety," Abraham thought to himself.

It was the way it was after all in the modern world: pills were given out to adults like sweeties for mental complaints and other such problems. Even though there was something odd about him Abraham gave him the benefit of the doubt: "Maybe it is because of his divorce that he is still going through a bad time," he wondered again.

Whatever it was, one thing was for sure: the singing voice of the Happy Celebrant was doing nothing for the ex policeman's peace of mind. It was plain to see, Ian hated the singer and

moreover the Celebrant's entitlement to be happy, while he was miserable in this life.

Another song duly followed and drifted out from the open door of Rick Papadopoulos. No doubt his show business friends had taught the Happy Celebrant how to command the space around him, even when the audience was faraway from the singer.

It was noticeable that Ricky always left his front door open when he was singing and playing his guitar. In the wintertime, he left the light on in the main room even when he was out; this was a reminder to neighbours no doubt that he would shortly return and they would be hearing from him in the not to distant future.

He probably thought his neighbours enjoyed him singing to them, and that he was the nearest thing they would get, in real life, to a Hollywood star?

Abraham thought it all good fun. He imagined the difference between the rooms where they lived. Ian's room cold and gray, with a small Hi-fi unit never used and flat screen tv that was always on the news channel. After all, objects were evidence to those who had worked in the police force.

On the other hand, Ricky's room colourful and bright with lots of recording gear all over the place. On a serious note, he thought: "It must have been his divorce that has upset Ian, coupled with his past, serving in Northern Ireland, lying heavy on his mind that has made him like this."

At the bar inside the club, he mentioned being in the province of Ulster to Abraham a few times, taking statements and filling reports. He gleaned from speaking to him that he had been delegated to register incidents involving the police for the Complaints Commission board.

As he put down his iPad on the grass, Abraham remembered what Ian had said to little Napoleon last Friday night, when they were drinking together: "One report, I made out has never left me. How humans can hate other humans like that - I cannot understand it."

It was plain to see from that statement, Ian was still imagining those things, and it was affecting him badly. This neurosis made a deep impression on others when they met him. For most of the time he liked to stay in the shadows, but when he was in the company of his friend the club chairman, little Napoleon, he relaxed and came out of himself.

It was now common knowledge at the club that many years ago Ian had joined the local church after his friend little Napoleon thought it would do him good. There were quite a few ex coppers at that time were practising Christians. This must have helped him, but Abraham could see he was not the type who could open up fully to talk to others about the word of God. He did not see him as someone who was naturally led to study the scriptures. He imagined he just followed what the preacher said, as if looking at a television screen. Of course, that was a few years ago now before he and little Napoleon left after the church shutdown.

And this Abraham thought was the thing that was really annoying Ian. He felt his neighbour Rick Papadopoulos carrying out funerals was an affront to western civilisation.

"How can that wee naff next door do the job of the clergy?" Ian had put this to the chairman at the bar.

Little Napoleon of course laughed. He was such a jolly fellow. He made light of dark things, and in his usual way he turned to Deirdre the barmaid that night, who was serving them, and the club chairman said: "Yes, we will need to get

rid of the Happy Celebrant, before he converts us all into pagans."

What did he mean by that; for they no longer went to any church? As far as Abraham could see, they were now apostates.

After a short interlude with nothing much happening in the area, Abraham heard the Happy Celebrant across the road playing his guitar again. He could not make out the song this time he played though. It sounded as if he had picked up his electric guitar and was singing a heavy metal song.

# 7

Abraham thought he had better get up off his deckchair and trim the hedge. He knew there was always something needing to be done in the garden, and if not done right away it would grow and would lead others to think badly of him.

Just as he came out of his old fashion shed, with shears in his hand, he heard someone knock on the ex policeman's door across the road. Strangely enough it was the Happy Celebrant.

Rick Papadopoulos was standing outside the ex copper’s door tapping the rail on his right

hand side, as if keeping the beat to the song inside his head that he had just sang. As soon as the door opened he bellowed: "Ian, my man, I have got a leak under the bath. Can you come in and hold the torch, so I can get into it?

Oddly enough, Ian smiled; for some reason he seemed quite pleased at this and ready to help his neighbour.

"Was this a good opportunity for him to see what was going on in the Happy Celebrant's house," wondered Abraham from across the road.

"Just give me a minute," said the ex copper and he went back inside his house to get something.

Abraham noticed when Ian came back outside, he walked with Ricky towards his property quite purposefully. He also noticed that he had a little video camera in his hand, concealed behind his back. The Happy Celebrant never noticed this, for he was too busy talking to him about the job in hand.

"Boilers, I tell you, man, they drive you round the bend. We should all go back to coal fires, if you ask me."

"I am sure we will get it fixed" replied Ian dolefully.

His neighbour liked this: “Yes, we have got the technology all right,” sang the Happy Celebrant.

Ian nodded, but as he did so, he held the little video camera quite steady behind his back, as they walked on towards his neighbour’s property.

“What is Ian up to? Why is he going to film inside the Happy Celebrant's house?” wondered Abraham.

Abraham knowing that Ian disliked him intensely knew he was not going to film his neighbour and show it off to his friends. He knew that much. This was no doubt a good opportunity for Ian to case the joint, as they say in the movies.

Abraham knew that he would be able to hear everything from where he was across the road; for there was no traffic on the road today, due to the pandemic, and when all the windows were open, he could here his neighbours and what they were saying to each other.

In any case Ricky always left his door open; for it was a friendly neighbourhood and most people did this when they were outside.

Abraham wondered if they noticed him as he started cutting his hedge, but if they did they never looked over at him. After going up the seven little steps and into the house, Ian gave the

Happy Celebrant a few minutes to go inside, then he followed him into the hall, then into the bathroom. Naturally, as his training had taught him, Ian looked around him for clues at the furniture and at the documents lying on the table inside the door. Abraham knew that where a man stayed, would enlighten the detective about the occupant, and not only that but what sort of relationship he had with the outside world.

"In here Ian!" shouted Rick Papadopoulos, "I am under the bath.

Ian on hearing this slowly walked along the hall and entered the long bathroom just inside the door. All the houses round here were built the same way, so Abraham could easily follow what was going on from across the road, by what they were saying.

"Lovely echo, man, don't you think," bellowed Happy Celebrant, "I should record my new album in here, while I am in the bath," he cracked a joke, as he lay under it.

"What do you want me to do?" came back the monotone."

"Ian my man, I am looking along the line where the taps are. Hold that tap on your left and I will tighten the booby."

Abraham stared over the hedge and into the hallway of the Happy Celebrant's house. He imagined Ian stepping over the body of his neighbour and gripping the tap as was his instructions to do so.

"Ok, got it," he heard Ian say in his usual dull way.

It did not take Ricky long to fix the leak, and a moment or two later the Happy Celebrant shouted out: "That's it, Ian my man. We have solved the problem. What a great team we are."

Presently, Ian stepped back into the hallway and moved through to the front room. Strangely enough, he started filming as he went, then he put away the small camcorder into his pocket before his neighbour appeared to greet him again.

"Good job,' Ian. Come on I will get you a beer for your trouble. You are a good man," said the Happy Celebrant, as he came out into the long hallway. "You know it is great to have you next door," he said slapping him on the back.

Ian was not against that and replied in an undertone: "Glad it's fixed."

"Sure is my man. You are a great pal, Ian. Listen my man from my last trip abroad, I have got some German beer leftover from a good

friend of mine in the music industry in Hamburg."

After saying this the Happy Celebrant turned right, the opposite way from Ian and went into the kitchen no doubt to fetch the beer from the fridge. Ian watched him, then waited for him there in the hallway.

Presently, the Happy Celebrant came back out with two bottles of beer in his hand: "Come on, let's go into the garden Ian and relax," said the Happy Celebrant putting his arm around him: "It is such a lovely day, today."

"Oh, right," said Ian taking the bottle from him.

"You are due it my man, enjoy the beer. Great work - what a team we are."

And as they walked out of the house into the lovely summer's day like old friends, Abraham noted as he trimmed the hedge across the road that the only one smiling however was the Happy Celebrant. From the strange scene across the road, Abraham kept remembering the nightmare dream he was having, how the man across the road was murdered while lying in his bath.

Those who knew Ian could see that even in his retirement his police training had taught him

to say very little to others, even in moments of joy. It was only at the bar at the weekend when his cohort was there, little Napoleon, after a few drinks would he let things slip out what he was actually thinking?

# 8

The next episode came about when Abraham went to the funeral of old Mrs Tavistock. She had been living in the area since the 1970's. She was a good old soul; everyone liked her. To show her popularity and steadfast nature it was well known that most folks left a spare set of keys with old Mrs Tavistock.

Abraham was asked to attend the service by Deirdre, the barmaid at the golf club. He was happy to put his name down: "We want to give

her a good send off, Abraham," was how she put it to him.

When he got there that day to the Linn crematorium, Abraham notice his neighbour Ian standing there, outside in a little group next to his pal of course little Napoleon. The service was scheduled for 10 am, but for some unknown reason it was running about ten minutes late.

As if to record this in his memory, Abraham documented the quaint scene, before approaching the mourners. Then after nodding at the folks he knew from the golf club, he looked down at the board beside them at the door and soon found the name he was looking for: Mrs Jean Tavistock, 10 am.

The little group standing under the entrance, where the cars came up, he noticed appeared motionless. No one said anything to anyone. It was the way it was. He knew as soon as the crowd came out from the service the cars would appear and take them away, then they would all go inside. Patiently together they waited not knowing what to say to each other. It was a cold morning for early summer, but everyone stood dutifully by for the signal to enter the chamber.

Presently, out came the mourners and after the last one departed, they all filed inside. In reverence, Abraham once seated said a prayer, then waited for the service to start.

Suddenly, the unmistakable voice of the Happy Celebrant came through the small speakers inside the little chapel: "Yes, she was a great old girl, you know, old Mrs Tavistock. We need more like her today, I can tell you that..."

He guessed Rick Papadopoulos must have arrived by car and entered the building by a side door. No one knew the Happy Celebrant was coming, let alone he was going to conduct the service of their neighbour. It was certainly a shock to most folks there - if not a surprise.

Abraham heard someone whisper near him: "What's that galoot doing here?"

The small party, relatives and friends, all looked at each other wondering that very same thing.

"Was she not a member of the old church before it shut down?" asked the same voice beside him.

Abraham could see everyone was surprised that it was a celebrant doing this service. Ian and

little Napoleon looked at each other as if they had just been betrayed by a devious enemy.

"How did she know Rick Papadopoulos?" asked the elderly fat woman next to him in a low voice.

"Who?" answered another woman to her left. "The Happy Celebrant."

Abraham thought he had better not say what he was thinking: "It is obvious she did; for she lived on the same street as him."

Instead he smiled at the two women next to him seated on the bench, as if passing his thoughts onto them. When everyone stood up, Abraham could see actually where Ian and little Napoleon were sitting. He noticed they were now both staring ahead of them as if waiting for a firing squad. Abraham knew Ian hated the Happy Celebrant even more now seeing him with his arms open wide, indicating to the mourners that they should listen to him talk about their neighbour.

"The first time I met her, I liked her..."

Abraham guessed that death had no meaning for either the Happy Celebrant, or the ex copper and in that way they were alike. "At least they have one thing in common," he thought to

himself: “Life for them is a scam from the cradle to the crematorium.”

Just at that moment, Ian looked at his mate little Napoleon again as if to confirm his worst fears. Abraham could see they were not amused.

“Your neighbour seems to be enjoying himself said the fat woman to her friend next to her.

“Oh yes, everyone knows him. He is on the radio, you know, every day from morning till night,” came back the curt reply.

Abraham nodded over at the women again as if to acknowledge them, and also to try and keep them quiet. As the Happy Celebrant went on and on about how Mrs Tavistock was not just a pillar of the community, but her likes he said with a long amount of echo on the last word: “Will never be seen again.”

Abraham as he looked out of the only window in the small chapel started to remember his dream about his neighbour. In fact, it kept coming back to him again and again. He saw Ian walking slowly into the house across the road from where he stayed. He went straight towards the bathroom of Rick Papadopoulos,. He could see it quite clearly: the bathroom door opened. Right away the Happy Celebrant came up out of

the water surprised at seeing his neighbour in his house. “Big Ian! What are you doing?”

Ian walked quickly towards him and put his hands round his neck, and forced him back down into the blue bath water. When his feet no longer kicked out in despair, over the side of the bath, and the ducks no longer bobbed about in the tub it was plain to see, like Mrs Tavistock, he had departed the scene.

When Abraham awoke from his murderous dream, he looked around him at all the different faces pouring out of the crematorium - many were red and some were crying.

Although he did his bit by being there, Abraham did more than that, he sympathised with some mourners going past him with a gentle nod. After doing this to show respect, he looked down at the red tiled floor and just stared at it. When he looked up again, he caught the face of the Happy Celebrant coming up the aisle. He was in a hurry making his way out of the chamber, shaking hands as he went by, with the mourners, like some film star heading for his limousine.

Abraham heard one old dear say to him as she shook his hand: “I’m a relative. I’ve come all the way from Houston, Texas.”

“Well ma’am, that just mighty fine of you. I tell you old Mrs Tavistock will be looking down on you, seeing you here in the old country, and she will be smiling away to herself.”

He noticed one local man who went to the golf club on a Friday night stare at the Happy Celebrant as he passed by, but he avoided speaking to him by making a gesture to the man next to him as if to say goodbye.

Presently everyone inside the small chapel went outside and stood for a moment under the arch. Most of the mourners went back to the golf club to the bar there. It did not take much to persuade them for free drink and something to eat was on offer on behalf of the departed. Mrs Tavistock’s husband had been a member the club, but few remembered him; for he passed away more than a decade ago.

When Abraham got to the clubhouse, out of the corner of his eye, he noticed the Happy Celebrant walk in and like him head up to the bar. Rick Papadopoulos as soon as he got there looked over at Ian, who was in is usual spot, next to Pinty, (who never went to anyone’s funeral) and after smiling to himself, the Celebrant clapped his hands, then croaked in his usual west coast

American accent: “Oh, it’s great to give them a good send off. I tell you old Mrs Tavistock, she will be sorely missed in the local area. No one will know where to leave their keys anymore. Yes, she was a great old girl.”

Ian who had just bought little Napoleon a whiskey, did not turn round, instead he grunted: “Yea, I suppose she will.” and looked at Abraham.

The Happy Celebrant, Abraham could see had rejected every tradition of his forefathers: deference, knowing your place, waiting your turn to speak. He was certainly not carrying on the traditions of the elders that went before him.

Even though he had been born in Greece, everyone knew Ricky had become American in his own mind, and was living in his own made up world. Wherever he went he portrayed this perfectly as if he was broadcasting himself across the globe.

Abraham standing next to Ian at the bar, could see that although he was positive about what he was doing, the Happy Celebrant had no real core beliefs. Abraham did not care for modern life, but he did not let it show or influence his relationships with others who were not

likeminded. He kept the traditions of his family and his core believes about life close to himself and he was happy about that. The way people acted now did not affect him at all. There was no use talking to others about tradition or culture; for most people had none. Abraham knew what time he was living in. Live and let live was his motto.

Ian and Ricky could not have been more different though. Although they were the same age, they could not have been more apart. One believed in a version of the past, even though it had been destroyed by secularism, and the other a version of the land of the free that really only existed in movies.

At one time, Ian had been part of a religious tradition, now with the loss of his local church he was aimless, drifting towards nihilism. In that respect, he was like his neighbour Rick Papadopoulos, the Happy Celebrant: both were lost inside a made-up world.

Abraham wondered if this was the reason for the enmity between them. The Happy Celebrant loved life; he even made out death to be something modern. As far as Abraham could see life and death to both of them were only to be understood now by watching movies.

However, the Happy Celebrant could show off his talent wherever he was and entertain people by acting the way celebrities do. This really got to Ian. To be fair to his friend, the club chairman, little Napoleon, just humoured the Happy Celebrant when he came into contact with him. Ian had joined the golf club the year he moved in to the area, but it soon became apparent to Abraham and other members that he had known the club chairman from more than a decade.

When things were starting to wind down in the club later that afternoon, little Napoleon came over to Ian, who was at his usual place at the bar. He always stood there at the far end of the bar looking at Deirdre the waitress, as if she was about to ask him something important. Invariably, it was just tittle tattle she got involved with - it was never more than that with any of her customers.

Even though that was the case, Abraham liked Deirdre, she was the one welcoming spirit inside the club. After placing an empty beer glass in the little dishwasher under the bar, she said to the ex policeman in her usual polite southside way: “Ian, we are organising a meal on Sunday. It is a

farewell do for Madge. You must have heard she is going back up north to live on the island of Uist. Is your name down for it?"

"No, but put me down for it," answered Ian, who to show affiliation to the club he was a member of, he put down his G and T, onto the bar, went into his pocket and brought out his wallet: "I didn't know she was leaving us."

"Yes, will all miss her. Eric is coming and so is James McGovern and Kelly Moncrief."

"Happy to be part of it. How much do you want?"

"The ticket is £10 a head."

What Ian did not know was that Deirdre had already booked a MC for the event scheduled on Sunday in the clubhouse. It was none other than Rick Papadopoulos, the Happy Celebrant. He had been commissioned by her to do the honours, after she saw him in action at Mrs Tavistock's service, she had been mighty impressed by him, and had told Abraham this when she was in the car on the way back to the golf club after the funeral service.

Abraham noticed that she did not mention this though to Ian, no doubt fearing he would stay away if he knew his neighbour was going to be up

on the stage again, this time inside his local clubhouse.

The proposed farewell do for Madge, would be busy Abraham knew that much. The main reason being that his neighbour was also the local Councillor, and it was common knowledge in the clubhouse that she would not be standing again.

When the day came round all the guests took their places, and at the appointed time the waitresses came out from the kitchen and served them with hot burgers or chicken dishes. As usual, when it got busy the bar was shut, and orders only came now from the floor.

For the occasion there were three other waitresses on duty: Deirdre, and two of her old friends from school Margaret and Timmy. The clubhouse although busy had a relaxed atmosphere about it. Abraham took a seat by the faraway window, and from there he could see people were chatting away and enjoying each other's company, waiting for the hot foot to be placed on the table.

Over by the door a DJ unit had been set up by the side of the little stage. Music was playing away, from a prerecorded tape. The current song playing was a 1976 favourite from the old disco

days, by Thelma Houston, *Don't Leave Me This Way.*

Abraham got there in plenty of time; he liked chatting with members he knew from the Friday night scene, as he called it. He guessed there must be around a hundred or so people gathered together for the shindig inside the clubhouse.

Madge was sitting with her husband at the top table next to little Napoleon and his wife Elspeth. Even though they were not speaking to each other, they looked happy enough. Little Napoleon he could see was on a diet of salad and was drinking *Perrier* water. This he knew happened from time to time on doctor's orders. He noticed Ian was at the back of the room next to the stage, looking out on to the first tee. It was all going well, the waitresses on duty in their black and white outfits were busy ferrying hot food from the kitchen and other dishes to the seated guests; everyone seemed to be enjoying themselves.

Abraham even though he was at the far end by the window noticed in the middle of the room an elderly couple he did not know. The man looked over at him as if they knew him so he smiled back.

Suddenly there was a crackle as the live mic was picked up off the deck and, as the track, '*Don't leave me this way*,' faded into the distance, the mid Atlantic tones of the Happy Celebrant came booming out of the speakers on either side of the room.

"Oh, it's great to be back here again. You know, I think I may take a room here. You are such lovely people..."

Most guests looked up and then went back to eating or drinking, but one face near the faraway wall turned white, so much so that someone sitting nearby asked him: "Are you all right, mate?"

Members and non members who looked at the man in question - who went to the bar every Friday - all chuckled to themselves. They all understood why the man sitting not far from them had turned gray on hearing the sound of his neighbour's voice.

"Here is one of Madge's old favourite tracks. It's from the 1980's album by George Benson, *Give Me the Night*. This is dedicated to all you old swingers out there in the clubhouse."

Abraham as soon as he saw how bewildered and betrayed Ian looked could not help but think

about his nightmare dream again: Ian moving along the hallway of his neighbour's house, going into his bathroom and grabbing the Happy Celebrant out of the bath and strangling him, pushing him down back into the water until his legs stopped kicking over the bathtub.

When he looked back at him, he could see Ian had slipped back into his old police mode again and was staring into the crowd in the middle of the room, trying to become anonymous once more.

After the meal the guests started to mingle around. Of course, Ian made a beeline for his friend little Napoleon. Abraham standing not faraway knew that he always kept the club chairman updated as to what he heard and saw in and around the area. "The ex member's wife who lost 80 grand to the phone scammer called me again, last night. Makes you wonder doesn't it about what's going on today," he told him as soon as he met him.

Little Napoleon lifted his glass of mineral water near to his mouth, and sighed, then went back to being a well-groomed happy chappy: "I am afraid Ian, there will always be people like

that who pray on vulnerable old women. All we can do is try and protect them."

Abraham knew Ian liked to drive his car round the area and keep an eye on things, and that he reported what he saw back to the club chairman when they met at the club on a Friday night. Even at a farewell do, he did this too: "There were some strange foreign men looking at the Mrs Tavistock house," he added as they stood together.

Little Napoleon was kept up-to-date on all the members from different sources within the club. Before taking another sip of *Perrier* water he said to Ian: "I hear Janice Long has become estranged from her neighbours. I am getting reports too about that from different sources."

Ian did not know her, but he did keep the conversation going by saying: "I had better let the boys at the station know."

Abraham had suspected that he was an informer telling on others. This was a way no doubt of him keeping in touch with his old pals at the local station. He knew, however, there was no use shopping his friends down at the station about the Happy Celebrant: for everyone knew

everything about him. He was an exhibitionist; he hid nothing about himself.

Everyone in the local area knew that at around 10pm a woman would turn up after dark at the Happy Celebrant's house. No one knew who she was, but every one knew about her.

They would play songs on the guitar together and she would sometimes sing along with him. The woman - whoever she was - would always leave in the small hours of the morning.

# 9

While out walking the next day, Abraham overheard Ian on the phone. Abraham had stopped along the road, just before the local garage, opposite the golf course. He noticed Ian had pulled in for some petrol. Even though he had his back to the garage, Abraham could hear his neighbour's voice quite clearly: "We can get the borrowed car from the compound, and have it back for a deep clean within twenty four hours..."

Abraham stood behind the small group of trees in front of the service station to see if he could hear some more dialogue. He knew they had an outdoor washing machine facility for customers to use, and people usually hung around until they collected them. At all times of the day, people queued up here to use them.

He pretended to look for some money in his pocket, and as he did so he tried to catch more of what was being said on the phone by the ex copper. From where he stood he could see that Ian, who still had his back to him, was filling up his car. With one hand on the pump, he was speaking on his mobile phone with the other one.

Just as Abraham was about to move off, all of a sudden a red jeep pulled into garage and the unmistakable voice of the local celebrity came booming out of it: "You guys in there are doing a great job, you know!"

Naturally, the female attendant behind the window, inside the little store, looked out onto the concourse to see what was going on. She smiled to herself, however, before handing a receipt through the window to the customer. The young lady obviously knew who the new arrival was.

Presently, the Happy Celebrant got out of his little jeep and as he did so he spotted Ian's Ford Fiesta, and he waved over at him: “How you doing there big man. You filling up the Oldsmobile for the weekend.”

Abraham thought the Oldsmobile a correct term for Rick Papadopoulos to use for Ian’s car. After all, everything in life to him was American.

The young woman at the window of the garage, who took payments from her customers, looked over this time at Ian, but Abraham could see she was more interested in the Happy Celebrant, who was now walking towards her. She was familiar to Abraham; for she worked sometimes part time as a barmaid in the club at weekends.

“Jeannie! How are you, my dear? Were you out last night at one of those house parties?”

Jeannie laughed at him as he shook his hips in the middle of the forecourt to show her how he loved to dance.

“Wish I was; I tell you,” came back the cute reply from the woman behind the window

“Yea, they were the days all right, Jeannie. I remember then well. That’s when we all used to go into town every night and danced the night

away. In those days you could shake your shammy all night long and not get arrested. Now everything is shutdown due to the virus, and not a nightclub left in the whole city of Glasgow open for the youngsters to go to," he said this with lots of reverb on the last word to give it full effect.

"I would not know where to go these days, anyway," admitted Jeannie, as she processed the credit card for the fat man at the window.

When he got up to the window Ricky said to her in a low husky voice: "Are you Zooming away these days with your friends, Jeannie," and as he teased her he waited in line to make a payment of some sorts.

Jeannie looked at him and then at the little crowd outside her window: "Oh, I would love to go online, but don't have the time," she replied playing the game.

"You can always call me up when I am in the studio, and I will play a request for you and we can dance the night away together."

"Sounds good," she joked, then turned and smiled at a lorry driver who was coming inside her little shop to buy something, "As long as you play my favourite song, I might take you up on that."

Ian by this time had filled his car up and was putting the pump back into its holder. Although, he had heard everything that was said over by the payment window, his face showed no emotion.

Abraham, knowing the way he acted at the golf club, could see he was livid. He was planning something, he knew that much. But what was it?

“Ian is divorced. He has had a bad time,” back came the words from the barmaid Deirdre: “It's like living with a silent partner.”

This was what his wife had said to her. Deirdre always spoke to Ian, but Abraham could see they were not close friends. Sometimes these harsh words the barmaid had passed on would haunt him. Abraham, even though he had never been married, understood the feelings of both men and women who had been hurt by a divorce.

“We should just live apart,” this is how his wife Anne apparently had put it to him: “You are better off on your own, Ian.”

Just as Ian moved from the pump to pay the attendant another car pulled into the small garage, just off the Mearns Road, and here lo and behold it was his ex missus, Anne. Abraham recognised her right away, for she had once been up at Ian’s house.

As soon as she brought her white mini car to a halt, she rolled down the passenger window, leant over and shouted over to her ex, in a serious somber tone: "Ian, you know it's Peter's funeral service on Monday, don't you?"

Turning round and seeing the car and who it was, Ian replied in his usual dull way: "Yes, I know I am going."

His ex wife moved her head nearer to the open window as if to get some fresh air, then she added: "You will remember it was Peter who introduced us when he was working in the old office in town."

Abraham did not know this is where they had worked, and where they had met. He could not really see that well now so he moved along a little bit, but he could still hear everything quite clearly. However, he knew if he moved past the trees, he would be exposed, so he just stood still there at the end of the trees and listened in.

Presently, he heard Ian say to his ex: "There is no one left in HQ now from the old days. Peter was the last man standing."

Ian had obviously fond memories of the old days and although looking his usual morose self, he did manage to say something kind about his

old mate: “Yea, you always got Peter the same way, didn’t you.”

Just as Abraham thought he had better get on his way, Ian noticed him walking by on the pavement, and so too did the Happy Celebrant. The latter without reservation shouted over at him: “Abraham, my man, you heading for the hills, again?”

Abraham waved at his neighbours as if joining in the fun, and he too laughed. However, out of the corner of his eye before he moved passed the little garage, he noticed the Happy Celebrant hand the lady who worked there one of his business cards. He slipped it through the window to her now that his turn had come to be served. Like all others in the area Abraham knew what it said on it: for he was always giving them out at the club every Friday night: *Call the Happy Celebrant for a good send off!*

Jeannie the garage attendant took the card and placed it on top of her till. She could not really examine it though, for the little white mini that had not long ago turned into her garage moved off again, with the woman inside of it shouting out of the window to the tall man in forecourt: “I am going along with ex colleagues. I

will know doubt see you there," and with that she exited the garage.

After the service of Ian's former colleague many people went back to the club where more tributes were paid to him. Apparently, the deceased had once been a member of the local golf club, way back in the days when you had to put your name down on a waiting list to get in.

What Ian did not realise was the Happy Celebrant had been asked to officiate at Peter's funeral service. No one expected that for he had been a member of the Roman Catholic faith since a boy. The chapel just down the road from where he stayed was still attended by his family. Why the Priest was not there at the service was a mystery to everyone who went that day to Peter's funeral.

When they all got back to the clubhouse, Ian looked morose. Abraham went to the bar to witness what was going on; he was so intrigued by it all. He was rather excited, but Ian said nothing to him.

In accordance with the tradition of the local golf club the Happy Celebrant was asked by Deirdre to say a few words before the drinks were served.

In his usual way, Ricky got up on a chair in the middle of the room and, after clapping his hands to get everyone's attention, he shouted: "To our good friend Peter!"

Then after everyone held up their glass, in honour of their friend and colleague, the Happy Celebrant looked out of the window and gave a little speech: "Yes, when Peter was a member here, I am told he was no slouch off the tee, and we all know his passion for his favourite football team - don't we? In the old days, I know that he worked in the garage just down the road from here before he joined the police. Skippy was his nickname, I believe at the pumps. That name carried on with his mates when he joined the police force. And I am told Skippy's first pal at the pumps was big Ian over there. Both joined the police on the same day. In the old days, the boys worked late into the night at the garage to get money so that they could go and see their favourite bands when they came to town. Skippy, I believe, was the first one to buy a car among the lads here before anyone else..."

Abraham had seen the Happy Celebrant twice now in action, but like others he could still not believe what he was seeing. It all seemed like a

television soap. For some reason Abraham taped the speech on his phone. It seemed to him important to listen to it again.

The Happy Celebrant made Peter out to be a swinging hipster, when in fact everyone knew him as a traditional worker who said very little about what interested him in life. This was the general opinion of the mourners at the club. The cool west coast of America accent made the whole thing completely unreal, no matter what the truth was about the man who had just passed away. However, all the guests clapped when he had finished, then more drinks were brought round for ex colleagues and members.

Abraham as he took a glass of white wine from the tray wondered about the talent of the Happy Celebrant. No matter what it was he was speaking about, his philosophy never changed. Due to the fact he could not go beyond this world he reckoned that was why he made everything unreal to appease the listeners who were left to wonder about the passing of a friend, or relative.

Ian and little Napoleon standing next to Abraham at the bar, as they did on a Friday night, did not show any outward feelings of emotion. The only sign given was that both men stared

beyond the speakers at either side of the dark red curtain on the other side of the room. The Happy Celebrant did go on a bit, but unlike the members beside him, Abraham did not hold it against Rick Papadopoulos. He knew it was a difficult job he had to do.

Sometimes Abraham thought that the man who lived across the road from him had an American twin brother, and when he got up on stage this is who it was that was now standing in front of him.

"Yes, good old Peter. He loved going to Vegas in the summer. He would go with his pals to the casino there, and I believe one time Peter had a big win, so much so they all missed the plane home..."

No one complained about the speaker for it would have been impolite to do so, and moreover no one wanted to upset any of his relations who had come back to the club to speak with his friends.

Afterwards when everyone was settled down with something to eat, Ian mentioned to little Napoleon: "I will not be staying long - not with that wee creep crawling about."

This all compounded with the images inside Abraham's mind, and the murder scene came back to him again. The bathroom door being pushed open. The face of the Happy Celebrant looking up from the bathtub. Ian quickly going towards him. The ex copper with his hands round his throat, pushing the Happy Celebrant back down into the bathwater and holding him there until his legs stopped kicking over the tub.

For a moment, Abraham forgot where he was. And such was his anxiety that after coming out from the nightmare vision, he had to remind himself that he had a painting to finish when he got back home: "That's right, that chap Eric wants to buy it. They will no doubt be getting drunk soon, dancing and following over each other. Better leave before things really get going."

In fact, he did not leave right away and neither did Ian for an hour later he was still at the bar with little Napoleon, chatting away to him. Ian's spirits had picked up and he was wondering where Derrick Forbes had got to. "You know, he joined the force on the same day as Peter and I, but I have not spoken to him since I left five years ago." Just then as if remembering something he turned round and stared at the club chairman

before adding: “I thought I saw him, you know, earlier on over by the window talking to another old colleague.”

Suddenly, the Happy Celebrant got up on his stool in the middle of the room again and shouted: “Let's all raise another glass to good old Peter. He was a great guy and a good Bobby...”

“Yea, sniggered Ian, as he looked at little Napoleon beside him, “What would you know - ya wee naff - about that...”

Like most funerals the majority got over the event pretty quickly, and after the alcohol was consumed everything in life became a blur to them again. Abraham took a different view, he thought that life for the living was only bearable when you could acknowledge the tragedy of it all. After that you could journey back out into the world again and face it.

Presently, the mourners started to interact with each other in a way that was fitting to their surroundings once again. Ideas were forward about what they wanted to do with their lives. Some members even discussed the new space outside the clubhouse, utilised now that lockdown was on, and how the reduction in the fees next year should help pull in more members. Of

course, the majority of guests mainly talked about places they had visited and how terrible the world was becoming due to the pandemic.

The thing that really got to Ian, Abraham could see, was the way the Happy Celebrant easily interacted with the guests, especially young people who were there. It was his show and he was the centre of attention. Everyone seemed to love all that nonsense he spurted out.

"Yea, good old Peter, he will be making his way around his beat upstairs checking everything is good to go for you guys down here."

After thinking about it, Abraham understood again why it was Ian did not like the Happy Celebrant; for just about every tradition that had been known had disappeared from life in Scotland.

It was clear that Ian could not accept the new ways of society. The clergy had been taken over by opportunists, and those who remained in churches were at best semi secular, promoting state values and initiatives. There was nothing sacred about modern life. Everything was state run, even though few knew about this. No one these days was encouraged to look beyond their computer screen for the answers to life around

them. A funeral service was just another event in life, like a garden party, reunion or college do, sad though for some that was. Anyone who talked about the afterlife was quickly sidelined in this new secular age in Scotland.

The general opinion was: the state did not plan for anything beyond this world, so why should people who talked about it? It was true everyone knew that the state did not encourage citizens to talk about religion so why should they? Ministers, and priests now were state actors in the control of parliament, firmly under the control of secular powers. If they went along with them of course everything was fine. They had good salaries and fat pensions, and that is why few said anything against their employer.

When Abraham was young no one would have dared patronize the afterlife the way they were doing now. In fact, the word afterlife was almost forbidden in society, like certain gender words or some old jokes. The Happy Celebrant gave the impression that dear old Peter had gone back inside a film, or cosmic bubble. He obviously thought people were happy with this; for they believed they could switch it off and on, anytime they wanted to, depending on their mood.

Abraham felt the solemn ceremony for believers - even for non believers - was still a lovely traditional way to say goodbye, but was seldom seen those days. Abraham felt sad and as he looked at Ian he emphasised with him about the way things had gone. Abraham was not taken in by this perverse generation who were controlling his homeland.

Unfortunately, the new generation did not see it like that; life for them was all about material gain, loss and recovery. This has been taught to them by their teachers at school and colleges and encouraged by the state later on in life. Above all it was frowned upon that any citizen should protest against anything in society. Even if citizens did not understand how they were supposed to act, they knew that as long as they were nice and friendly to others they had nothing to worry about. The general opinion was leave nothing, spend everything when you are here and you will die happy even though no one knew what that really meant anymore.

Meanwhile, the young were wandering about online, and when they were not they were at their play stations, or in their cars bombing around the place. They had no interest in what was generally

thought of as the Christian western world anymore. The reason for that was their parents did not seem to be interested in that either. They were a generation of television soap loving fans. The present generation was not so much a lost generation, but an anonymous one. Looking for the truth in this world was for those who were not from the world, Abraham knew all of that and he looked around him to see if there were any believers there.

The Happy Celebrant was a humanist who at times quoted the teachings of famous well known secular figures; he was from the hippie generation though not himself a hippie. He liked the American scene, it seemed to be ephemeral and good fun to be part of. Why should he not make a few bob from those who believed in nothing?

# 10

The next day, Abraham heard a strange conversation at the bar inside the clubhouse. He popped over there for a coffee; sometimes he liked to go to the club in the afternoon to have a chat with Deirdre. Ian was there talking to the club chairman little Napoleon at the bar. They were having a coffee too. It was clear from what they were saying that Ian was not happy at the way things were going and not only that, he was thinking of doing something about it.

"We should not allow that heathen across the road to spout his nonsense over the coffins of any more of our members," he said indignantly, as he put down his cup with a crack onto the saucer.

“No, I quite agree with you Ian, said little Napoleon humouring him. Then the chairman as usual tried to make light of it: “We will need to put a message up on the board saying: See anyone else bar the Happy Celebrant for a good send off.”

Just then an elderly man came in from his morning round of golf, and ordered a pint of lager; he laughed when he heard the club chairman say this. However, Ian stared into the gantry and meditated, not even looking at him: “I mean he is so arrogant,” he grunted, before lifting up his coffee cup again.

Little Napoleon, seeing Ian morbid and ill at ease, pulled out one of his better jokes: “No, you are quite right, Ian. We can’t have any more of our members losing their religion after they have gone.”

Abraham, standing not faraway, did not say anything. He knew, of course, the chairman could ban Rick Papadopoulos if he wanted to. All he had to do was call a meeting and make up a cock and bull story about the Happy Celebrant upsetting the members, and get him turfed out of the club.

And he did say as much to try and appease his cohort at the bar who was still staring into the gantry as if communicating with some powerful ally there: “I will think of something, Ian. Don’t worry about it,” said the chairman with a wry look on his face.

The following day in the garden Abraham was sitting outside in his usual place in the lawn, under the shade of the fir tree reading his morning Guardian newspaper on his iPad. It was another lovely lockdown day. He was thankful that the large fir tree and the hedge at the front shielded him not only from the sun, but from his neighbours on the other side of the road.

Through this space between the hedge, Abraham could look out at the world and feel safe. From there he knew he was not being watched by friend or foe. He felt camouflaged by nature, secure from all the ills going on in the world in the year 2020. Sitting there he often wondered about life, but most of all he thought about his two neighbours across the way. They intrigued him, both for different reasons though.

Ian he could see was outside. His neighbour was pottering about around the garage. He had cut the grass and was now tidying the little flower

bed along the front of the house. It was a small garden he had, not much needing done to it, but he always attended to it nonetheless. You could not say the same for his celebrity neighbour, the Happy Celebrant. Ricky left things until everything was overgrown, and it got to the point that it looked as if no one lived there. Then just when it seemed he had retreated from his communal duties, he sprung into action like a man embarking on a landscape gardening course.

About five minutes later out he came: Rick Papadopoulos otherwise known as the Happy Celebrant. He took the rake in hand from the wall, where he had left it six months ago, and began to clear the driveway, singing to himself some funk song as he gathered up the twigs and litter.

It did not take him long until he spotted Ian in the middle of his garden pruning away at the roses. In his usual upbeat sing-song voice the Happy Celebrant shouted over the fence to him: "Ian, what have you got growing up from the ground this year, my man?"

Ian lifted his head slowly and in a monotone he tried to play the game: "Marigolds."

Just then a blonde woman came whizzing past in a new 4x4 silver tank, touted her horn and waved through the car window at the Happy Celebrant, and as she did so she glanced at the other man standing there.

Abraham noticed that as she passed by the small row of houses in her big automobile, she laughed to herself as if knowing what it must be like to live next door to the famous man: the Happy Celebrant.

"Ah, there she goes, the fabulous Linda making her way up to the Mearns, no doubt to do the weekly shopping," croaked the Happy Celebrant, as if about to introduce another track on the radio. "I used to know her, you know, when she danced at the Mae West club, way back in the good old days. She was a great girl, you know - always up for the parties was Lindy."

Ian looked over to the road, but the car had disappeared by now, and he went back to the job in hand of pruning the flowers.

This fascinated Abraham way beyond the pandemic conspiracy stories that he was reading about again in his morning Guardian newspaper. He could see there was something unusual was going on across the road between the two men.

They may have been the same age, but they were both different, not just in their outlook, but in every other conceivable way.

A few moments later, Abraham's attention was grabbed once again by the mid Atlantic tones of his neighbour: "Ian do you know anything about boilers?" sighed the Happy Celebrant, as he walked up to the fence that divided them, "Can't get the old hot water out of the taps this morning."

Looking up and over the hedge at him, Ian replied cautiously, "Well, mine is pretty standard."

After putting his garden trowel down against the grass verge that led up to his house, he asked as he straightened up: "What is wrong with it?"

"Oh, the old pressure has gone down again; this time there is an E119 message on the dial."

"Did you try and top it up?"

"Ian, it would be great if can you have look at it; I am not up on boilers, myself."

Ian slowly took the weed from his hand and dropped it down into the bucket by his feet. For good measure he then bent down again and pulled out a dandelion from the ground: "Ok, I will have a look." he said mechanically.

The detached bungalows were all the same around this area. The boiler was in the cupboard in the hall. The houses were mainly sought after due to the golf course being nearby, not because there was something different about them. Abraham knew that much. He watched with interest as the two men walked together towards the house of the Happy Celebrant.

When the door was left open, Abraham knew that meant he could now keep an eye on things from where he sat. By this time, he was sure there was something strange going on in the mind of the ex copper.

"Ian, I will need the hot water for the old bath you know on the Sabbath," joked the Happy Celebrant.

As soon as he said this, Abraham remembered again his nightmare dream about the Happy Celebrant being murdered by his neighbour: how he was pushed down until the water covered him, and his legs stopped kicking over the side of the hot tub.

Ian walked into his neighbour's house in a slow and deliberate manner and moved towards the boiler cupboard. He may not have been

familiar with the furniture, but of course he knew the layout of the house all right.

As Ian stared ahead of him, as the Happy Celebrant held the cupboard door open. Presently, in the hallway Ian looked up inside the cupboard and he must have noticed that the engineer who had fitted the pressure valves had placed them down below, so he bent down and inspected them.

This was confirmed by the ex copper when he said to his neighbour: "Normally, the pressure taps on the boiler are next to it, but yours are down here for some reason," and he pointed into the dark space.

The Happy Celebrant stood back to let him fully utilise the area around him. Ian crouched down to get a better look, then he released some pressure on the tap, then glanced up at the machine to see the reading.

With the E119 message obviously now gone, he reported this in his usual mundane way to his neighbour: "That's it."

"Great job, Ian," sang the Happy Celebrant behind him.

"Go into the kitchen and try the hot water tap," Ian instructed him.

After Ian had looked around inside the cupboard to see what else was there, he shouted: “Right, try it now!”

The Happy Celebrant in the kitchen ran the hot water, and the boiler fired up. “Ian, I heard it,” he sang in a loud voice: “Good job.”

Not long after this Ian stepped back into the hallway and joined the Happy Celebrant there.

“You are a wonder!” cried the Happy Celebrant, I will be able to have my bath tomorrow night and scrub the old body again.” And as he approached Ian, he slapped him on the back and told him his favourite joke: “I have a bath once a year, you know, whither if I need it or not.”

Abraham thought again about his recurring dream: the man entering the bathroom, pushing the door open, then moving towards his neighbour, the Happy Celebrant, and strangling him till his legs stopped kicking over the bathtub. The face of the murderer, screwed up like in agony as if death awaited not only the victim but the killer too.

Ian did not laugh at his joke; he just looked around him. Abraham could see now that he was planing something, but what was he up to?

As the afternoon drifted in to the evening the bar filled up for the Friday night soirée. Abraham thought there seemed to be more excitement inside the bar than usual, as he chatted with members and non members; there was certainly a lot of talk about the recent funeral service for Peter the local policeman.

Most folks were amused how the Happy Celebrant had charmed his audience. Little Napoleon, of course, humoured everyone. Abraham knew the club chairman always picked up on things at the bar and commented on them, to keep members happy. He was good at telling jokes.

After looking at Ian the club chairman turned to Deirdre the barmaid and quipped: "We should have a whip round for the Happy Celebrant and get him a ticket back to America."

Although Ian did not laugh, he nodded and said to himself: "Yea, that is a fine idea, either that or take him up to the Wastefield site in a wheelie bin."

Abraham who was standing at the bar speaking to a new member from Muirend thought nothing more of it. That is until he went

home and was awoken again by strange thoughts during the night.

As he lay in bed, Abraham remembered the case of a man in another golf club, over in the north side of Glasgow. Apparently, he was sleeping with one of the member's wives, and it was reported in the press that his body was dumped at the Wastefield site on the south side of Glasgow. "They never did find it though," his mind mumbled, as he tried to get back to sleep.

He knew this was an interesting case; for the man would have got away with it but for boasting about it to his girlfriend. Apparently, he had told her over the phone how he carried out the murder. This was picked up by a local amateur spook who passed it on to a detective he knew.

Lying there in bed, Abraham turned on the radio and you know who came on. When he was alone, he would often hear the Happy Celebrant's voice on the radio. It was well known he did voiceovers for commercial companies, as well as for local radio shows.

He wondered if Ian was listening to the same station, as he was, and if so what his reaction would be like. He could imagine him getting out of bed and throwing something at the radio,

shouting: “That bastard on again - can’t get away from him!”

When his voice came on the tv, Abraham would look up and watch the channel, although he could not see the Happy Celebrant’s face, there was no doubt about who the voice it belonged to.

When he first heard it a few years ago Abraham immediately thought to himself: that’s that chap across the road. Now he just took it for granted and thought nothing more about it. Abraham laughed when he thought how daft it all was: “Poor Ian, even when he is in his house he can’t get away from his neighbour, the Happy Celebrant. No wonder there was talk at the club about getting rid of him. Surely they are not going to expel him on a made up charge,” he wondered as he switched off the radio.

It was not clear to him at all what these men were like who ran the golf club. Little Napoleon was jolly, but there was something hidden about him. His jokes were too well thought out. It was a comment by a fellow member at the bar a few months ago that drew his attention to this. After finishing his pint of beer the man made an off the cuff remark about a fellow member to the club

chairman: “You should look after your brother,” rather than make fun of him,” said the unhappy member.

This was referring to a member who wanted to get back into the club after fighting with someone at the bar one night.

Little Napoleon obviously not thinking about the man in question, but about his deceased sibling, snapped back: “My brother is dead.”

It was out of character for the club chairman to say this, yet it was revealing all the same.

# 11

The next day, Ian got out of his car. It was the usual time, just after midday. After putting the large plant pot that had fallen over nearer to the stairs, he went inside his house and shut the door. He always left around 9am and came back for lunch. Abraham often wondered where he went to. However, it was a lovely day: "Why should I be thinking about things like that," he said and yawned, before touching his iPad and turning another page.

Once again, Abraham sitting in his garden relaxed; he had mowed the lawn and tidied up the pathway. Everything looked in reasonable order. He was happy and content. It would soon be time for a coffee and piece of iced Madeira cake. These days were peaceful; for there was no traffic on the go due to the pandemic. It was as if life had reverted back to somewhere in the past, when the world went on at a reasonable pace. It was the same overhead: no planes coming in to land at Glasgow airport made the sky wonderful and serene again.

Abraham remembered he had put his sunglasses on top of his head and lifted them down onto his face. His hair was getting long and thick; for all the hair salons were now closed due to the latest government directive. Anyway, he thought he looked younger with his hair now over his ears.

With nothing much else to think about, he remembered when he had long hair at school. That had been a good era for him, plenty of girls and days spent learning about love making. Looking back, the majority of women he had got to know liked long hair in young men, and he thought women today still did too. He had not

seen his mate the hairdresser now since early March, and it was now June - that was indeed a record for him.

Presently, the Happy Celebrant came out of his abode, got into his red jeep and drove away in the direction of Clarkston toll. A few moments later there was a knock at the door across the road. It was his Ian's only friend in life little Napoleon.

Ian was only too happy to see him and suggested that they sit outside in the garden. It was natural to do this with the weather being so fine. The two summer plastic chairs were still there; for they had been left out under the parasol during the night. Normally, he put them away in the garage before it got dark.

So they sat in the middle of the lawn at each side of one another with a little metal white table between them. After about five minutes, Ian went back inside and made a coffee for the chairman and happily brought it outside for him to drink there.

Like others today the two men sat there together enjoying the afternoon sunshine, and talking about the pandemic. After this, the chairman got down to business and said to Ian.

“Ian we need you on Sunday, we are short of men on the door for the annual fete. We have brought it forward before the new laws come in next week for all leisure centres.”

“Is it that time already:” asked Ian nonchalantly before stirring his cup.

“Well, as I say we are bringing it forward a couple of weeks, I guess that is why it doesn't seem that long since we were there last year, handing out the prizes,” beamed the happy club chairman.

Little Napoleon in his usual polite way smiled at his friend, then he added: “Of course, we can't expect it to be like last year due to the pandemic, but we should get some people coming along. Social distancing must be in place, of course, but if we can get some funds in, this will certainly tidy us over until the summer.”

This was the only time, Ian felt really at home when the chairman of the golf club came to visit him and spoke to him about important club business. They were about the same age and shared the same kinds of things in life.

Knowing his neighbour was not in, Ian wondered aloud: “I hope you know who does not hear about it.” And as he looked over into his

neighbour's garden, he said in a bitter tone. “He should move away from here if he has any sense, you know.”

Little Napoleon laughed at his friend: “I am sure he will get to know about it.” Then after taking a drink of hot coffee, he remembered something: “Was that him on the radio last night?”

“Probably,” groaned Ian. “I turn it off as soon as I hear him.”

Before he offered the club chairman the unread morning paper, Ian noticed the smart watch on his wrist, and he commented on it: “Is that the latest Apple watch you are wearing?”

“Yes, it was a present from my wife; for my birthday.”

“Nice one,” said Ian with a little smile.

Just then, the Happy Celebrant arrived back in his red jeep.

Ian decided that he had better not say anything until he got out of his car, just in case he attracted his attention

“Is that your neighbour arriving,” commented little Napoleon, looking round.

"Yea, that's him all right, the only American to have been born in Corfu, now living in Scotland," responded Ian sarcastically

"Is that where is he originally from?"

"Oh, no one knows. They say has had an American accent when he came to this country. He of course maintains he was born with it."

Little Napoleon smiled on hearing this; for he knew Ian's dry sense of humour.

"You see much of him outside in the garden?"

"The other day, I had to fix his boiler."

"Is he married?"

"No."

"I remember when he came to our local area a few years ago, before he bought that house there; he popped into the club one Friday night and asked for the chairman at the door. In fact, I signed him in."

"Yea, that's right. Did he not come along with some singer."

"Yes, she was the daughter of the previous chairman," answered the present chairman

"That's  right, I forgot about that."

"Maybe it was her fault he joined our club?" joked Little Napoleon.

Presently, Ian remembered more about who they were talking about: “She now works in the supermarket down the road, doesn’t she? At that time, she was a hostess for an entertainment company before they made her redundant.”

“Anyway, Ian we are being diverted,” interrupted little Napoleon, “The Gala Day is starting earlier this year at 11 am. Can you be there to see people into the clubhouse. Although the new restrictions are not in force yet, we need to keep an eye on the new regulations.”

Ian went into the house and brought the coffee pot out, and he duly poured more coffee into both cups. He even gave the club chairman a chocolate biscuit that he had stuffed into his pocket. He furtively laid it on the table for his one and only friend to take up at his leisure.

“Oh, you shouldn't have, Ian.”

Feeling content the chairman continued after he bit into it: “I didn’t know you were into Swedish crime fiction Ian, I see you reading the *Killing*,” he said as he picked up the book from the lawn where Ian had obviously dropped it.

“Any good?"

"It is nothing like the tv series. Passes the time, I guess. I got it at the charity shop down the road, before they closed last week"

"Thought you would have had enough of the gory stuff after your stint in Northern Ireland, with the police there."

After saying this, both men looked at each other as if inhabiting one another's soul, then Ian moved the coffee pot to the middle of the table.

The club chairman seemed happy: "Right, so let's get organised for another Gala Day, and see if we can get a few more coins in the coffers."

Abraham could hear every word from across the road. It was all very strange. Sitting behind his hedge, he had often wondered at how the two men acted with each other when no one was there.

"I will get on my way now, Ian," he heard the club chairman say.

Ian too got up off his garden chair and stared at Little Napoleon, as he got ready to go. Ian then picked up the empty coffee cup, and reassured his chairman: "I will be there on Saturday. You can rely on me."

"Good man, Ian. We need people like you at the club, you know."

The club chairman must have thought he had better say something else to show his fellow member he appreciated his hospitality. Going into his pocket he told him: “I got this in the post the other day from one of the golf reps.”

Ian looked at the small box in his hand and asked: ‘What is it?”

Little Napoleon ready to show him beamed with delight: “It tells you where your golf ball has got to.”

This tickled little Napoleon. Ian could see that, and he stared at the object more intensely. The club chairman opened the small box and with a smile handed the computer device to him.

“How much is it?”

“Under hundred pounds.”

“Really.”

“You can get it on the Internet.”

“Ping Gone is the brand name.”

“Not a bad name for a tracker device to find your ball,” said Ian appreciating the advice from the club chairman.

“I will send you the link,” said little Napoleon, as he placed the little computer, Ping Gone, back in his pocket: “Right let’s get ready for Saturday, Ian,” and with that he was gone.

# 12

At the Galla Day that Saturday as always after the event there was a private party. Normally, it was held in the clubhouse for members and local residents. This year, however, due to the pandemic, it was held outside in the grounds.

Abraham went along later on in the afternoon. More than anything, he was intrigued as to what the ex policeman across the road was up to. Was he going to moan again about the Happy Celebrant to the club chairman, and was little Napoleon going to crack jokes abut it all?

Although in many ways it was entertaining, Abraham had grave misgivings about what was going on. Even the relationship between Ian and

the club chairman was odd. They were too close, like teacher and pupil. They appeared to get on yet were destined to depart from each other. He could see it was not a healthy relationship; it was like following a religious leader. The disciple always following the leader while the leader always gently trying to get away from the disciple.

Outside the clubhouse, Abraham sat at a table beside a young television presenter and his girlfriend, and a man who originally came from Columbia. They had both come to see their friend, a longtime member of the golf club. They did not know each other though, but were chatting away quite the thing. Oddly enough the man who they had both come to see was in quarantine and could not get outside his house at the moment. However, being a member of the golf course he phoned his friends and invited them to go along to the fair.

After the light Buffet meal, a band came on signing old fashioned pop songs. Even outside they were so loud that they immediately overpowered everyone. The general feeling was: stay and be overcome by the powerful effects of amplification, or leave right now. Some folks did

just that while others sat it out and waited for more food and drinks to arrive.

About half an hour later there was a break in proceedings, then out of the blue came the unmistakable voice of the Happy Celebrant. Like a call from another world it boomed out of the speakers outside the club: "Howdy folks! I hope you are all enjoying yourself out there. Yes, it's the good old fair time again. Thought I would just come up and say a few words to cheer you up in this terrible time we are living in..."

Ian sitting near Abraham looked over at the man opposite him from Columbia, then he searched around for the club chairman little Napoleon, as if to warn him about some impending doom.

The club chairman in fact was standing by the entrance to the door chatting away quite the thing with two retired lady members. Little Napoleon liked the ladies and always made himself available for them. Obviously by the look on his face he did not know the Happy Celebrant was booked to do a turn that night. Being a jovial chap, he looked and smiled at the small manicured woman in front of him, who everyone knew went to the local church past the toll. She

had had enough and was heading home, and had a great excuse now to go: “He is too loud for me that man. I will be seeing you,” she said and departed.

Presently, the club chairman went over to Ian to let his friend know that he had nothing to do with the act now on stage. His happy countenance in contrast to the words he spoke did not encourage Ian though: “I did not know he was still here,” he said firmly.

Ian nodded and replied ominously: “We will need to do something about this.”

As was the way at the local golf club, singers were always welcomed to perform after the buffet. Apparently, the Happy Celebrant put his name forward early on in the evening, and when his turn came he got up on stage again this time with his guitar. Of course, it was no bother for him to dive across the road and get his instrument. He obviously wanted to bang out another few of his favourite songs for his adoring fans at the club.

Abraham sitting not far from Ian like all the guests knew the Paul Maccartney song, the Happy Celebrant was now singing; they had heard it often enough through their walls just about every other night: ‘*Jet ooh...*’

After singing his song, the Happy Celebrant spotted Ian again this time at the makeshift bar outside the main entrance. He was standing next to the club chairman.

"Ah, I see my good friend over there - big Ian. Yes, I tell you he is a good man to have if your boiler is not working. And I know he is a great guy here at the club too, swinging the clubs for many a long year..."

This went down well with the little crowd sitting outside the clubhouse; for they all turned round and beamed at the man in question. Ian even got a clap from a few guests. After creating this bond with the audience, as ever the professional south side entertainer, the Happy Celebrant then launched into another song.

Ian on the other hand was embarrassed - mortified even. Presently, he moved away from the temporary bar and stood outside the front window. There he tried to act bored as if he had seen it all before, and was extremely tired of it now. To show he was unimpressed, he looked around for Deirdre, the barmaid, then when she came back from collecting glasses he walked over to the bar again and ordered himself another G&T drink.

Abraham was thinking of going, but he thought more was to come, so he stayed a little while longer. He could see quite clearly now that Ian was depressed there was nothing exciting left in life for him. He was just a shadow in the shadows killing time. But there was something else, something was stirring within him. What was it that he was up to? He could see that even though Ian and the club chairman, as they stood at the bar together, said very little to one another, but they seemed to be in on something.

Everyone in the club could see little Napoleon, thought himself not a bad fellow. He looked his usual cheery self and beamed at everyone, as he stood at the entrance of the clubhouse. On the other hand, Ian next to him looked depressed. Abraham when he went up for a refill overheard the ex copper groan under his breath: "Look at him, he is such an arrogant wee shit."

Later on that night some young fellows who were never usually at the club appeared, and it was plain to see they were quite taken by the Happy Celebrant, who due to the fact no one else wanted to do a turn went on singing until the bar closed.

Abraham as he sat with his back to the hedge heard a conversation not faraway from him. It was clear to see Pinty, who as usual had too many pints, was not impressed by the singer. He mocked the Happy Celebrant as he looked over at the entrance to the clubhouse.

A few moments later, when the club chairman little Napoleon came by and Pinty stopped him and said: "Imagine him doing your funeral oration," then after laughing, he added: "I could do his though: 'He was a great man, you know, well known all over the country for that lovely mid Atlantic voice of his. Oh, those croaky tones, we will never hear the likes of them again. Every time when you heard good old Ricky boy speak, you were transported right across the Atlantic. He was such a professional man with a mic in his hand. No matter where he was, in the studio, on the television, or at his own private golf club. Yes, no matter where he was his voice brought the sound of America to you. Away down there on the old Mearns Road, they are dancing the night away.' "

When Abraham heard Pinty say this he could not help but laugh. Moments later, he heard another guest crack a joke to his friend that he

had brought along: “That’s that numpty up there that will give you a good send off...”

Later on in the evening Little Napoleon came over to the bar to speak with the barmaid. Everyone knew it was last orders. Abraham had been chatting to Deirdre about his holiday abroad in Cyprus, but had to cut it short when she started collecting glasses or rather plastic cups from the tables on the lawn.

“Not a bad night Deirdre,” proclaimed the club chairman. “Quite a good collection of people have come along, and we have still got the raffle to count from earlier on.”

Deirdre picked up an empty wine glass that was right in front of her and after cleaning it, she spun into action: “Oh, I will do that now before I pack up for the night,” and when she found the large beer tumbler, under the counter, she took the money out of it: “Right let’s see what we have got here...”

When Abraham got home that night he was tired and a little bit more than tipsy. He had enjoyed the day chatting with the guests out on the lawn. He loved drinking beer over at the club. Abraham could switch off from aesthetic pursuits quite easily, and dive straight back into real life. In

fact, when he was at the bar, he oftentimes forgot he was an artist and had paintings to attend to back at the house.

Just before throwing himself into bed that night, Abraham remembered that on the way out of the golf club, Ian could not hide his anger. He said under his breath to the club chairman, as they walked together along the path: "Why did you let that creep get up on the stage."

Little Napoleon looked at Abraham for he could see he heard him. Abraham who was beside them on the path just smiled at him, as if to say: "That's a good one."

However, Abraham was taken aback; for he had never heard Ian so serious like that before. Even though it was summer it was dark in the lane due to the overhanging trees that hid the moonlight. He remembered the night sky was cloudy and this seemed to add to the effect in his mind of the tragic scene. Abraham was pleased he did not get involved with them, and he just shrugged his shoulders as if all he was thinking about was looking forward to relaxing when he got home.

However, just as he was about to turn left towards his house, he overheard something

unusual. Ian and little Napoleon were behind him at this point. Before he crossed the road, he heard Ian say to him: “It won’t be long before he is moving on.”

# 13

The following Saturday evening, Abraham as usual walked along the main road towards the country. He wanted to get a breath of air before he turned in for the night. As he walked along, he noticed a tall dark figure just over by the lane that led to the golf course. He could tell by the languid figure and the way he stood that it was his neighbour Ian. He was talking to someone, but he could not see who the other person was.

“I will shut off the electricity from the box outside. You slip in and see our friend is all right in his bath. After you deal with him, I will take him to the Wastefield site. I am going to be using an unmarked car from the old garage. We can go along the back streets; there are no cameras there that will pick us up. The number plates will be changed and the car will be left abandoned by Rouken Glen Park. It will no doubt be found the next day.”

Abraham wondered who was this speaking to Ian, but he could not see the man’s face through the woods. The man was as tall as Ian, so he knew it was not little Napoleon.

Everyone in the local area knew that the Happy Celebrant had his bath every Sunday night at 10am. The reason for that was that he left the small window open at the side of his house, and sang at the top of his lungs as he scrubbed himself clean.

On the Sunday, Abraham after a lovely walk went into the country and ended up at the Fountain tearoom in Eaglesham. He had been there before with an old girlfriend from the office when he worked in town.

As he sat at the same table as he had before, over by the window, he looked out at Motte Hill between the two roads, that made up the lovely country village.

His great fascination may have been the sky above him, but Abraham also studied with a keen eye the landscape of the earth too. He believed there was a mystical connection between both of them: land and sky. Thinking about some of the landscape paintings he had studied, he believed art was only an idea about the world at a certain time in life. No painting could give over the full mystery of earth and sky to the viewer. However, he believed art could produce an image that could give the viewer an insight into what lay behind the mystery of it all at a certain time in life. It was all a great game; he knew that much.

When Abraham painted, he painted what he imagined the world to be like. He knew that what had been painted in life by other artists was only a dream representation of what was out there. If the image of a painting fitted into the viewer's dream, then he or she would agree that was how the world looked.

People found Abraham's work strange and a little eccentric, but he was no stranger to them.

He spoke to people about his paintings, but he never gave anything away about himself. Life was like art and art was like life. In that sense he created an illusion; for that was what he believed people wanted. He knew people wanted to escape the mundane world around them.

Abraham reckoned that the only way to understand a person was to wait for them to reveal their aesthetic thoughts. For most of the time, they were just like him looking for ideas to help them understand the world around them.

In the main, he felt his fellow human beings were like him and gave little away of their true feelings about life. Only now and again did he catch a true feeling or genuine emotion from another being. Everything was either counterfeit, rehearsed or contrived to impress you or another who was listening in.

After day dreaming about future paintings, he gazed back into the little tearoom; for the little bell behind the door rang and another customer came inside the cosy cafe. Abraham looked to his right and smiled at the waitress who was standing there doing nothing by the till. Presently, she came over, opened her little notepad, and took his order for a coffee and a scone. Then she went

back to the same spot again and stared again towards the door of the tearoom.

Just then, a fat woman got up and was just about to leave. He noticed she was carrying a large red handbag, the type you get when you buy an expensive gift in a shop in town.

"Goodbye, Mrs Stewart," shouted the waitress.

Mrs Stewart immediately turned round and as she waved at the young waitress, she said extravagantly: "See you next week, my dear."

However, Mrs Stewart instead of going outside had to step backwards and hold the door open for someone; for it was obvious another customer was coming inside the tearoom.

Presently, a well known voice boomed out around the stucco walls for everyone to hear. "Abraham, my man! How you doing? I saw you sitting there at the window, all alone," he croaked in his trained radio voice, "Thought I had better pop in and see my old pal."

After he said this, the Happy Celebrant smiled over at the waitress, who he could see was watching him closely, then he turned back round and added: "You checking out the countryside for a new painting, eh? Good man Abe, my boy."

Abraham knew this was his calling card. The unmistakable cool mid Atlantic tones of the D J. His voice he knew was at home in city night clubs but not in country tearooms. The American accent of course went through the cafe like a dose of salts. There may have been only two others in the small tea room, sitting behind Abraham, but with the crackle of his studio microphone voice now in the air, the listeners had been transported into a small theatre. Playing the game, the two silver haired grannies sitting behind him looked away, but both were natural actresses and played their parts accordingly: "That's the chap who does the burials for the non believers."

The other one with her back to Abraham replied in a low tone: "I don't want to look round Agnes. "They say he is on the TV now, as well as the radio."

"I could well believe it."

The Happy Celebrant smiled over at them to confirm that they were both correct in what they had said, then he sat down beside the painter.

"So, how are things going, my boy?"

Abraham smiled and nodded at him for by this time he knew his style. However, he thought he better ask him something before he launched

into another radio outburst: “Got the car with you, today?”

“Never without the oldsmobile, my man. Just got the old jalopy out of the garage down the road there at the cross. The boys say it is good to go for another year.”

Abraham smiled, took up his coffee cup and wondered why Rick Papadopoulos was not in the studio today: “Not working?”

“Day off today, my friend. However, having said that, I have got a funeral service over at the old Linn at 3pm. Thought I would pop up to the village and see how the family was before the main event.”

“Is it a local man or woman?” enquired Abraham delicately.

“Ah, Desmond Macredie. He was a good man, worked in the hotel just down the road there, originally from Glasgow. He joined our golf club way back in the 70’s, I believe, but gave it up a few years ago. They are having the reception tonight for him down at our club.”

“You expect many will go?”

“Oh, there will be a big turn out. He used to serve in the local bar just down the road here, before his accident. The old hip went, I am

afraid. I am sure little Napoleon will be, as we speak, getting the bar stocked up."

Abraham could not place the man, though he had heard his name mentioned once or twice at the club. He thought he better change the subject: "How is our neighbour Ian doing?"

"Oh, I saw the big man with the chairman this morning just along the road heading for the clubhouse. No doubt half way round the course by now."

"I see the club are offering a discount if you sign up for the next two years."

"Yes, there are dropping the prices all right. Sign of the times I am afraid, Abraham," and as the Happy Celebrant looked down at the menu he added: "Good luck with that, eh! A lot of people are being laid off at the moment due to the pandemic. It's a difficult time, my friend."

Keeping the conversation going Abraham asked him: "Are you out on the course much these days?"

"Oh, can't get my handicap down, I am stuck at 14. Think I will have to give up the old sticks and sell them."

Abraham notice that look of honesty in his blue eyes. He was really not a bad chap. Just then

the Happy Celebrant said something unusual to him: “You know Abraham, Ian sometimes stares at me; I just can't make him out.”

Abraham, although recognised the sentiment in his voice, thought he better not pursue it

“He came over and spoke to me when I was in the garden last week; he was on about a forthcoming event at the golf club, then he just stared at me, but there was nothing in his eyes - could not make him out at all.”

Abraham suggested: “Must be all that trouble he saw Northern Ireland that has made him antisocial.”

“I know what you are saying, and he fixed my boiler last week, so I can't say a bad word against the big man.”

Abraham knew that even though Ian hardly said anything to anyone there was something about him that made him interesting, though not in a good way.

Abraham had met all kinds of people, especially when he used to hang about the art scene in London. He knew troubled characters were always thought of differently by artists, than by the general public. The majority of artists of course did not want to get into trouble with them,

but the dark side of life was something he noticed they paid attention to. He knew some of his fellow artists used this in their art, but Abraham never went there. When he sensed a malevolent spirit inside an interesting character, he moved away from it.

Even though there was something about Ian that made him think of a man he had met in London, who had killed someone, he kept that to himself.

Abraham thought he had better try and change the subject away from his neighbour. "You know we used to go to a tearoom just like this in Soho way back in the 90's, and sit there and talk about art for hours."

"You miss the old town?" chanted the Happy Celebrant.

"I miss my friends there," replied Abraham. We used to go out a lot together."

Abraham looked at the clock on the wall "Need to get moving. I am walking back along over the Humbie Road," he told the Happy Celebrant.

"If you wait, I will give you a lift, I am going down that way as far as Waterfoot."

“No, it’s fine. I love to walk, stop and sketch as I go along.”

Just before leaving, the Happy Celebrant stopped Abraham as he stood up: “You know Abraham there is something odd about it, but I just can't put my finger on it. The only time I have felt like this was the night before aunt Sadie died. You know the last time Ian was in my house, I felt I was talking to a complete stranger. Strange but true, he wanted to see every room in my house, saying that he was interested in the different ways the houses were built in our area. But you know as well as I do, we all live in the same type of bungalows - so why should he be interested in mine?”

Abraham walked from the tearoom, out of the village in the direction of the Mearns. After entering the newly built monstrosity, the underpass, built to protect pedestrians from tin machines, he turned right and went down the Floors Road.

At Waterfoot, Abraham went along the farm road in his usual meditative way. After crossing over in the direction of Flenders farm, he came out opposite the golf course near to where he lived. It was always a lovely walk: “To be so high

up and so near home - heaven is not far away," was how he put it to himself.

The view of Ben Lomond with the valley below of Glasgow was always awe inspiring to him. All the birds in this area he noticed seemed to dance to the same happy tune, as if the unseen mystery of the country was a joy to them and a delight to everyone who came to it. It was lovely to just look at the trees, the hedge rows, and all the wonderful flowers along the country paths, before going back onto the main road and into his house again.

The countryside thrilled Abraham way beyond his understanding. There was something about this area that held him. It was peaceful, beautiful and serene. The pandemic and the subsequent lockdown did not bother him; for every day Abraham looked forward to going for a walk into the country. He did miss however travelling to other places.

When he was young he loved the country and it has never left him. John Constable was his favourite painter. The rustic life of the artist really suited Abraham. The friendly nod to a complete stranger, on the road between the villages, he knew had been going on since people came here

to this area. It was a great sight to see how a fox cut across a field, how sheep and the cows grazed together. Even a tractor coming down from a faraway farm made his heart happy. However, most of all he loved the sky here; it was wonderful to look at. He felt the sky had everything up there that was possible down here on earth to fathom out. When he looked up he was always refreshed; it was not so much that he was hypnotised, by signs and wonders, it seemed to calm him and reassure him about life in the modern world.

As he walked along, Abraham stared at the sky and drifted with it into other worlds and universes. The sky to him was like a never-ending painting, still only for a moment waiting to be captured before it changed and moved away again. He knew that you had to go with the sky when it yields itself to you, and through the door you go to an unseen world to wherever.

"The timeless sky is what I like," he was always telling himself as he walked along.

There were dangers, of course, he knew that much when so much beauty was around him. While out walking along the main road that leads to Eaglesham, not far from the miss placed name Williamwood school. Abraham noticed on the

road a deer lying; its legs were moving, blood was coming from its mouth.

In the distance, two men got out of their 4X4 cars and walked towards it. One was obviously the driver that hit it, and the one who was behind him. He could not say if it was the driver that hit it that picked it up and was now moving it over to the other side of the road. Like all incidents in life, however, he could see that traces would remain here on earth for a time, and he watched the blood of the deer drip down his jeans as he did this. One fellow clapped it as it lay in the gutter, as if to say sorry. Then both drivers after this seemed happy that the road was now clear and off they went.

One funny thing did happen just before he got back home that day. He spotted a white van tearing along the road from the direction of the clubhouse. He could not really make it out who was inside, but there were three figures there. Abraham saw it coming so he crossed the road quickly. The young front seat passenger must have thought this a great infringement on the rights of all drivers on the road today; for he lent out of his window and shouted out at Abraham, naming a

part of his body he thought determined the character of the pedestrian crossing the road.

To Abraham this was hilarious, and a sure sign that lockdown was coming to an end. It had been noted in the local area by everyone that ever since March, when lockdown began, motorists had been courteous to fellow passengers, even tradesmen well behaved. It was as if life had returned to an earlier time, before the media promoted the spirit of the modern plebs. Even dog walkers stopped for a chat to others now, promoting friendly neighbourliness before passing on by. Joggers too acknowledged those they passed with a grunt or grimace. It was all so strange, everyone was friendly and chatting, asking after others: "Where are you going today? Are you keeping well?"

Indeed, it was just like olden times before cars and television sets destroyed the natural communication between humans, even to those who lived in the countryside.

# 14

That day, Abraham got back around three o'clock and went straight to work on his painting *Bonnyton Sky*. This was a view he knew well from coming back down from Eaglesham. It may have been modern, but he did not try and capture it like a photograph - the way some artists do - his brush strokes reflected a moment in time, like a thought to keep close to you, or treasured memory, that would last forever.

The thing Abraham always did when he had finished a painting was he put his sable brush in his teeth and walked towards the window, and placed the canvas there. He always put it in the front window so that people going by could look at it.

Although, Abraham lived on the main road, it was mainly neighbour's who walked by this way. Some school girls came down to Clarkston, and sometimes they stopped and stared in at his window to look in at his paintings. Some even chatted to each other about what they saw on his easel, before heading back to school or home again. "They are young art collectors," he often thought to himself, "Looking for ideas for life, I guess."

After some soup, pasta with chicken, and a hot apple tart with Greek yogurt, Abraham did what he always did, he lay down on the sattee and listened to some music on his hifi. Tonight, he listened to the album by Philip Glass, entitled *Akhnaten*.

After nodding off he awoke, got up and started to prepare another painting for tomorrow. Later that night, just after ten thirty pm, he was standing at the window looking out admiring the

ominous sky above the bungalows across the road. It was such a strange scene; for dark mournful clouds were slowly moving over the evening trees, and this made him wonder if the weather was going to be good again tomorrow or was it about to change.

Suddenly, out of the corner of his eye, he saw the tall figure. It was Ian his neighbour; he was walking across to the Happy Celebrant's house. Ian went into his neighbour's garden, up the seven little steps, put his hand in his pocket, brought out something, opened the door and went inside. This was so unusual it made Abraham wonder: "Maybe he is fixing his boiler again," giving the ex copper the benefit of the doubt.

Abraham was distracted and took a Skype call from the South of France. It came in from his friend there, and he chatted away quite the thing. There were lots to talk about due to the situation involving the pandemic. Governments all over the world were shutting down their economies; every country was trying to deal with the threat.

Just before midnight as he closed the curtains, he looked over again at the houses opposite. He watched the thin tall figure of Ian; for he was now

coming out the Happy Celebrant's house. He was alone, and the odd thing was he was wearing blue surgical thin gloves. Many people were doing this, due to the virus threat. "But he never wore them going in," the detective inside him reminded himself.

Abraham watched Ian walk along the front, down the path, across the red chips, then round the little hedge and back inside his own house.

After a light supper, Abraham switched on the television and watched the late news, then off he went to bed. That night he had a strange dream: a black crow swooped down onto his window ledge and pecked at it. Then it flew across the road and sat on the top step of the little stairway where the Happy Celebrant lived. 'Darkness cannot hide the light,' a voice from somewhere said to him in his dream.

More often than not Abraham would get up during the night. Sometimes he would grab himself a cup of Bovril; this usually would do the trick and off he would go back to bed again. On occasions, he sometimes watched the Italian satellite channel, but he never usually opened the curtains.

However, for some reason after finishing his late night drink, Abraham looked outside onto the quiet dark road. He was still interested in the weather; for he wanted to go walking again tomorrow. As he drew back the summer curtains, he noticed Ian coming out of the Happy Celebrant's house; this time carrying what looked like a long carport roll. He seemed to be struggling with it. Struggling with it was not the right phrase - he could hardly hold it. Ian eventually made it to a car parked outside his house. It was not his car though he was going towards. This was an old looking vehicle and there was someone sitting inside it. Abraham wondered what time it was. He looked down at the small clock on the coffee table 3:45am, and he thought to himself: "What is Ian doing out at this time of night?"

It was very odd, so much so that Abraham told himself that he was dreaming. He wondered again about the crow at his window, and it flying across the road to the Happy Celebrant's house.

Abraham could not believe what he was looking at. It was no wonder Ian was struggling to carry the long carpet roll with both hands; for the thing weighed a ton. Outside the parked car with

the rolled up carpet, he continued, but struggled with it to get it inside the boot.

It was at this point a man in dark clothing opened the door of the strange car and came to help him. He could not believe it: the head of the Happy Celebrant dangled out of the carpet roll. As suddenly as it had popped out, the head of the Happy Celebrant wobbled back inside it again. Ian somehow wrestled with the carpet and got it into the boot of this mysterious car. It was plain to see his neighbour Rick Papadopoulos was dead - he had been murdered by the ex copper next door to him.

"This must be the car that was mentioned by that man in the lane the other night," thought Abraham to himself as it drove away.

There was no doubt about it there was a body inside that carpet, now in the boot of the car, heading for goodness knows where. Even in the dead of night, Abraham could see his neighbour had been murdered. As if in a dream, Abraham shut the curtains and walked back to his bedroom. He never put the light on at night, so he knew he had not been seen. In a trance he made his way in the dark back to his bed, as if he had been seeing things.

He could hardly understand what was going on never mind the character he was playing in this nighttime drama. Before he fell asleep, he told himself: “I can't say a word about what I have just witnessed; I will need to let it go as if it was all a bad dream...”

Nothing much happened for a while, but then a few days later police cars started appearing all over the place, and outside on the street men in plain clothes, along with other officers from the local police station were going in and out of the Happy Celebrant’s house.

The consequences of not saying anything about this made Abraham outlandish. In a strange way he became extrovert; his mind became lively as if high on life dancing away in a nightclub.

At the golf club the following Friday night, he chatted to Deirdre as if he was chatting her up like a schoolboy; he even offered to buy her a drink.

She noticed this and thought the excitement of what was going on across the road must have got to him. Having a good understanding of all men who came into her bar, she teased him:

“Have you come into to some money Abraham - splashing the cash I see...”

However, there was only one story in town. All the talk was about what was happening across the road; but nothing so far had come to light yet.

In company, Abraham was fine. However, when he was on his own, he was troubled. Many members were speculating of course now about what was happening over at the Happy Celebrant's house - but no one really knew. More police officers had arrived; some started searching the wooded area just to the left of his house. No one had seen or heard of him since the previous weekend. The police were now doing their rounds asking residents if they had seen anything suspicious.

Ian at the bar casually wondered if he was away on holiday and had missed all the excitement. Abraham knew that was not true.

“America, do you think?” Deirdre mocked him.

“No,” said Ian, “Maybe, Largs,” which got a laugh from the little crowd at the bar.

Not long after this a report was sent to the Press Association from the local police, saying:

A body of a middle-aged man was found at the Wastefield site, yesterday by refuge workers, and a murder investigation is now under way.

Everyone at the club held their breath. By this time most members had stopped speaking and speculating about the incident; for no one had seen Rick Papadopoulos, for over a week now, but everyone feared the worst.

Another report duly followed in the press and was reported on all Internet sites:

*The body of 63 year old Rick Papadopoulos, otherwise known as the Happy Celebrant, has been found on the Wastefield site, north of the city. Anyone with any information please contact the number below.*

That night Abraham had another strange dream: Ricky was on the course making a putt and Ian was holding the flag. Ian turned round and looked towards the clubhouse, and there at the window looking out was the club chairman little Napoleon. He had a monocle in his left eye and was holding a glass of sherry in the other.

Abraham woke up in a sweat. “What am I going to do? Should I tell the police? What am I going to say to them?”

Later on that Saturday night a woman officer rang his door bell. He could see she was no dumb blonde. She paused for a second and looked at him, before saying: “We are investigating the murder of your neighbour, Rick Papadopoulos. Can I ask you, did you know him?”

Abraham looked down at the clipboard in her hand. He could see she was young, smart and eager to do her duty. He smiled at seeing her lovely blonde hair creep out from under her police cap.

“Of course, I knew him, but don't know anything about what has happened to him,” he stuttered

“Well, if you think of anything let us know,” and she handed him a card: “Detectives will be coming round tomorrow and the next day.”

During the day he was fine, but it was at night after he had finished his painting that Abraham got anxious.

This normally led him to his computer in his bedroom. Unknown to any of his friends Abraham was an expert hacker. He had learned

this when he lived in London. At college in the capital he got into a bad crowd who were known as Hackback. They had become quite successful, so much so that he heard that some of his friends were now running corporate companies protecting them against foreign cyber invaders.

Right away he started looking into little Napoleon's computer, in the clubhouse. He may have been a jolly chap, *Play up! Play up! And play the game,* and all that, but he was sure he was involved in this along with Ian. There was no doubt about that in his mind. In his trash can on his computer, Abraham found an email hidden in a folder marked DJ. It had been sent to a private address: 'The fairies are going out next Sunday.'

"That's the day Ian carried out his attack on Ricky. That was the day he carried him out in a rolled up carpet and along with another man they took him to the Wastefield site." Abraham repeated to himself.

Of course the news of the murder of the Happy Celebrant went round the village like wild fire. At the club the following Friday, Deirdre put on a black dress, and pinned a poster on the wall of the Happy Celebrant's face. Apparently, this

was given to her by the police and she was told to do this. Under the photographs it read:

*If you have any information about the murder of this man, please contact us immediately.*

At the bar, Abraham was of course interested in Ian and little Napoleon and how they were now behaving. The usual suspects came that Friday together for a drink. However, he noticed there was no conversation about their neighbour Rick Papadopoulos between them.

Abraham thought he would prompt a reaction: "I liked him, you know; he was always upbeat. He said what he thought," he put this to Deirdre.

Deirdre, who was serving the club chairman, looked over at Abraham as she was pouring him a half pint of beer.

"Yes, we will have get ready for the funeral service," she sighed, as she topped up the head of the blonde beer

"Any word about it?" asked Ian.

Abraham noticed he looked at no one when he said this. The club chairmen seemed to know

though: “They think it will be a week on Wednesday.”

“That's a long time,” said Deirdre.

“Well, the police are still checking everything,” sighed little Napoleon.

One peculiar thing was that Ian and the club chairman did not interact much with each other that night, giving the impression that they were not so close as people thought they were.

Abraham as he stood at the golf club bar came up with a simple plan: “I know what I will do. I will use the tape I have of the Happy Celebrant speaking about Skippy his mate at his farewell do, and play it into his house late at night from the wooded area when Ian is in bed.”

So, in the dead of night, Abraham a few days later slipped out and did just that: he played the Happy Celebrant's voice - the one he had recorded on his phone from the club - from the woods not far from Ian’s house.

It was a good idea for Ian’s bedroom was in range of the trees, near to Ricky’s old house. In the quiet night, he knew he would definitely hear it. He played it night after night, only a couple of minutes were necessary, he felt to get the effect he wanted.

After doing this for a couple of weeks, Ian one night came out if his house, half naked, in a terrible state. He ran over to the wooded area, looked around him at the trees as if he was being hunted by someone or something. Abraham saw him and hid behind a tall Scots pine and waited to see his reaction. This time the ex copper slumped to the ground in front of the Happy Celebrant's house.

It was three am in the morning, and it was plain to see Ian was distressed. He had obviously had a breakdown. Abraham watched him slowly get back up on his feet and go back inside his house, then he himself headed back across the road to his house.

The following day Abraham heard that big Ian, as some folks called him, had handed himself in to his old colleagues at the police station. Apparently, saying to them that he could not take it any more.

Little Napoleon of course was brought in for questioning at the station, and consequently the two men were charged with the murder of Rick Papadopoulos, otherwise known as the Happy Celebrant.

Album: *Consequences of not Speaking:*

https://music.apple.com/gb/artist/jwyou/494892070

https://open.spotify.com/artist/1Z6rE0cywB54sBbnoxeg4u

https://walkerjohna.wordpress.com

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